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Fractured flocks: A leadership crisis in the CRC?

*Why pastor-church separations are escalating,
and how to move beyond the hurt to healing and hope*

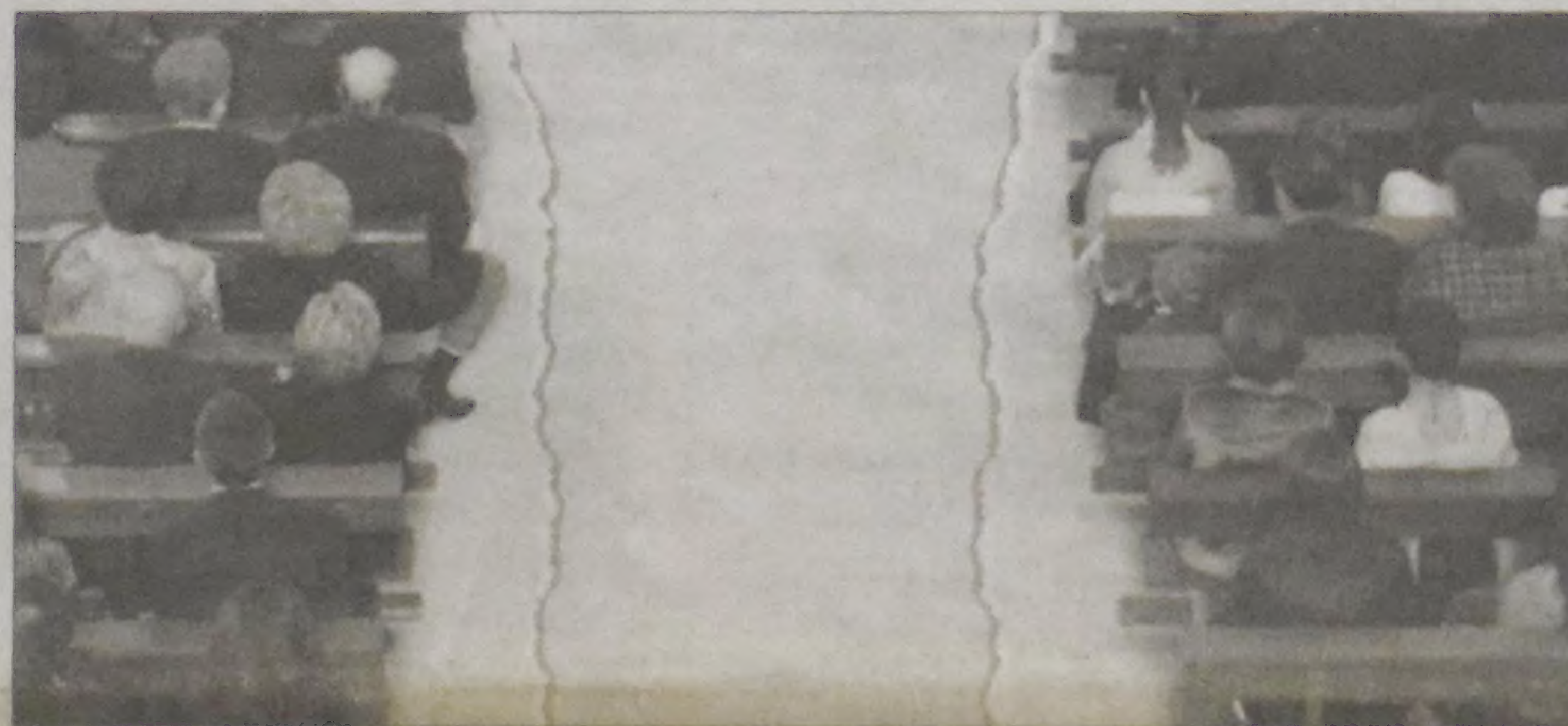
Peter Schuurman

Pastor Y was called to a particular CRC to replace a long-serving minister. He and his council were leading the congregation through some necessary changes.

"I just got burned out, dealing with more and more negative feedback," says Pastor Y. "I even had some elders say to me, 'Whatever you do, you can't be a minister.' Others came and visited me and swore strong support of my ministry. It was very confusing and discouraging. After the Article 17, I was plagued by self-doubt, asking myself, 'What

did I do wrong?' and asking God, 'What do you have to say about this?' My wife felt helpless – wanting to make it better but being powerless to do so."

"Article 17" is a section of the CRC church order that describes the process for the release of a pastor from ministry in a congregation. While colloquially assumed to be a "no-fault divorce" following a breakdown of relationships, former Canadian Ministries Director Rev. Bruce Adema reminded me "not all Article 17s are unhappy; sometimes it's a matter of a pastor moving to a



*The stories
are local,
but the reality
is a widespread
pandemic
of leadership
breakdown.*

different calling, with no negative implications on either the congregation or the minister."

However, if the number of such ministry releases ebbs and flows over the decades, we are currently experiencing a tidal wave in the CRCNA. Data obtained from the Candidacy Office in Grand Rapids reveals a stunning 580 percent increase since the 90s in ministers ending their tenure with a congregation via Article 17a. There were 24 such incidents through the 1980s, 25 in the 90s and 146 in the 2000s. Statistics for the next decade are

looking even more dreary.

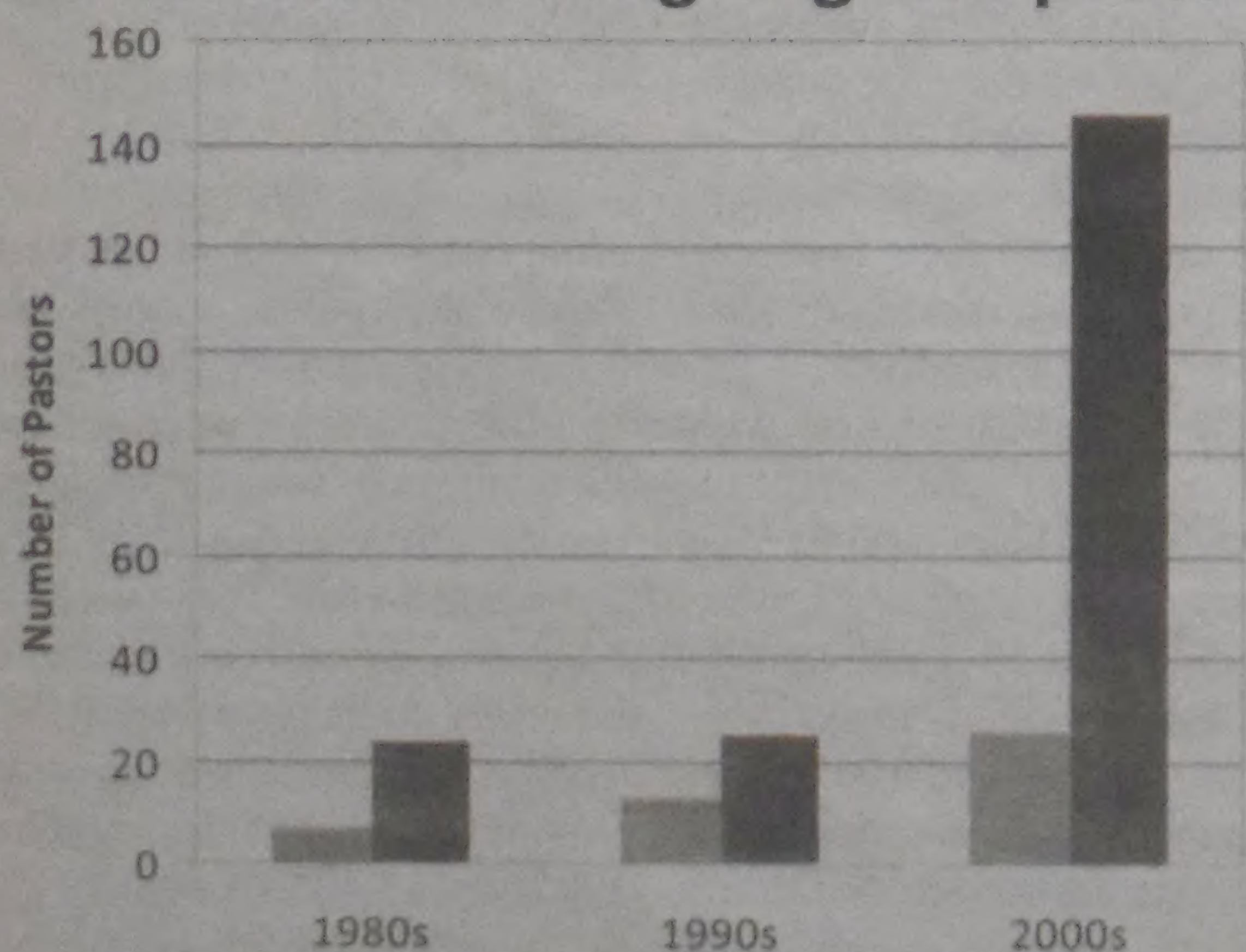
"There have been a dozen Article 17s in my seven classes in the last year," said Eastern Canada's Home Missions Regional Leader Rev. Adrian VanGiessen, "and there are three more potential separations that I am aware of in process right now." These statistics do not include those leaving their charges via Article 14, which indicates, perhaps more seriously, that the minister's calling itself is in question and involves both honourable and dishonourable forms of discharge (these numbers tripled in the last decade

from 11 to 30 cases). The statistics furthermore do not reveal – and thus Synod and CRC congregations do not know – of the many instances in which a pastor leaves his church on bad terms without going through Article 14 or 17. They escape through a call to another church or retire.

This journalistic essay, however, is not about church articles as much as it is about the pastor-church tensions they reflect. We know church conflicts are not a new thing. Paul admonishes the body of Christ in Corinth: "You

See Fractured flocks on p.2

Left via Art. 17: Outgoing CRC pastors



ALLAN BICK

■ released from ministry (Art 17c,d) ■ released from congregation (Art.17a)

Source: David Koll, Director of Candidacy in the CRCNA. Data taken from the relevant Acts of Synod and CRC yearbooks.

One more pastor out the door...

Virginia Miller Lettinga

When the details of the severance package being offered to the pastor were disclosed at the congregational meeting, members moved uneasily in their chairs. The proposal was for a month of salary for each year he had served the congregation with the promise that if he found "equivalent employment" before the 10 months were up, he would draw the severance package to an early close.

See One more pastor on p.3



"Why won't anyone explain to us why they wanted the pastor to leave?"

News

Fractured flocks *continued*

are still worldly. As long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, you are worldly and living by human standards, aren't you?" (1 Cor 3:3 *ISI*). And Corinth wasn't the only New Testament church upset by internal strife.

Why a crisis now?

Why the sharp upswing in failed church-pastor relations? The issue is certainly complex, and interviews with denominational leaders, pastors and members reveal numerous reasons, indicating more of a crisis of cultural expectations than of leadership *per se*.

For one thing, the denomination as a whole is in decline, and a sinking tide rocks all boats. "Anxiety in congregations too often leads to reactionary and uncharitable behaviour," says Jack Tacoma, a Home Missions church coach in Eastern Canada. Pastors can be scapegoats for demographic shifts, generational change and downturns in the life-cycle of a congregation. It's easier to appear heroic when standing on the helm of a ship that is riding the wave of growth and expansion.

Some would insist that pastors bear more responsibility for current troubles. They are lingering longer in congregations, sometimes because of the needs of their children or spouse's job rather than the needs of the congregation. "The days of the itinerant 'Suitcase John' are gone," said one church

Each Art. 17 unique

"Someone once commented, 'When you've seen one Article 17, you've seen one Article 17.' It's true that no two situations are precisely alike. The range of situations covered by this single article in the Church Order is immense: from painful and lamentable to simply circumstantial or purely personal."

— Cecil Van Niejenhuis, "The Scarlet Number" (*The Banner* Feb. 17, 2012).

leader. Pastors want to buy and sell real estate with a good market; they want more benefits and less pastoral care work.

"It wasn't his preaching," said a congregation member. "It was his attitude. He just didn't seem to care about the people in the congregation. He cared more about his boundaries. We lost half our members under his watch."

In fact, a pastor's release from ministry may be a symptom of congregational issues rather than a reflection of a pastor's abilities. Mark Chaves' book on religious trends has a graph illustrating "confidence in organized religion" and since the 1970s the graph line just plummets down — more so for religion than for other institutions. People are more skeptical and the church has been culturally marginalized. The old denominational loyalty has been challenged by consumer preferences, and con-

gregational members are leveraging their wishes more and more with their wallets and feet. Pastor Y said to me: "There are so many differing expectations from members — some even completely contradictory — I emptied myself out trying to be all things to all people."

David Brooks, a popular and wise *New York Times* columnist, has opined about a general "Follower Problem." That is to say, our culture is quick to "question authority" (as the bumper sticker says) bypassing the notion of legitimate authority. "People are cynical and like to pretend they are better than everything else around them," he remarks. "Those people at the top are nowhere near as smart or as wonderful as pure and all-knowing Me." A narcissistic celebrity culture infiltrates both pulpit and pew and eclipses the servant-hood model of Scripture; we swim in anti-institutional currents.

We can lament this cultural shift, as many clergy did in my interviews. "The church is not just a business and the pastor is not just an employee," they said. "We have lost the authority of ministerial office." Still, we ought to equally consider that the congregation is not just an audience, and Jesus is not just a figurehead. We are all priests under Christ.

Besides, it would be difficult to call people back to a reinvigorated clericalism, reminiscent of the entitled "*dominee*." One denominational leader suggested to me that some seminary professors may be instilling ministry candidates with the notion of "positional leadership" — a deferential view of authority based on hierarchical assumptions. Ministers, however, are no longer the sole educated member of the congregation, and may even have less education and experience in church order or leadership than many lay members. John Witvliet has said on occasion that we are experiencing a monumental change in 3,500 years of Judeo-Christian religious history: the rise of the lay leader in worship. If a pastor approaches leadership as an "expert" who leverages his or her positional authority, he is often setting himself up for a power struggle. Many congregations are steeped in the new network culture, and pastors need to learn collaborative "relational leadership" skills (EQ) if they want to thrive in a "priesthood of all believers" congregation.

The authors of *Pastors in Tran-*



Return to your 'Call'

Henry Numan

The frequency of dismissing a pastor has certainly increased and this is a lament. In order to prevent this from happening it is important for a council to have an annual and ongoing review of the "job description," the Letter of Call, to evaluate the actual performance of the pastor involved. This particular excellent tool is often ignored or overlooked because in many cases councils do not know exactly how to go about such evaluations. Please consult in this case with Church Visitors assigned by classis in order to come up with a good review system.

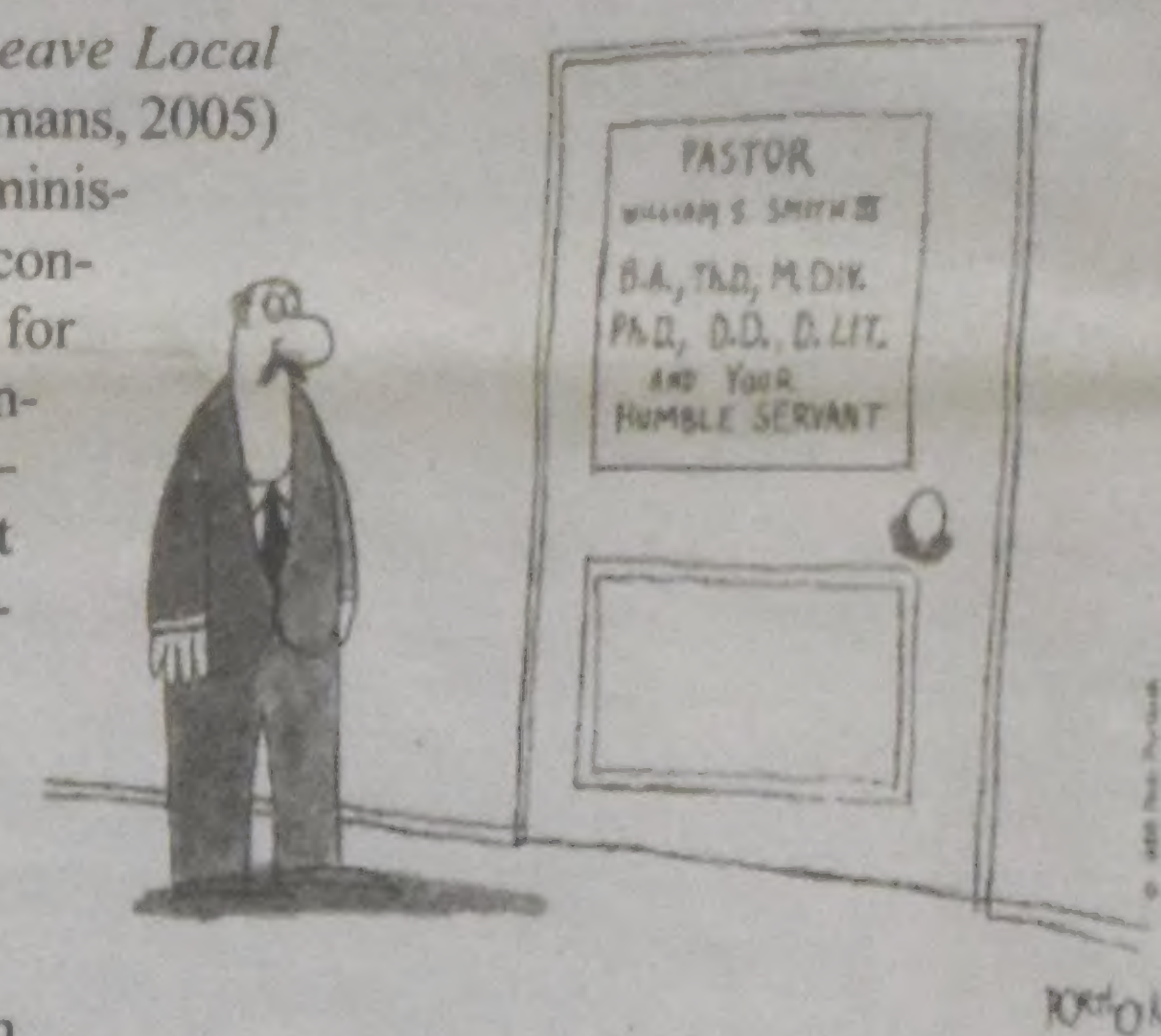
A growing awareness needs to be developed in order to stem the tide that has resulted in so many Article 17 cases. We need continued wisdom, willingness and a desire to function as a solid team where true shepherding can take place in order that the "flock" can be edified and built up to be and become a mature body in Jesus Christ, the Head and Chief Shepherd of the Flock.

Henry Numan is pastor emeritus in Vancouver, B.C.

sition: *Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry* (Eerdmans, 2005)

surveyed over 900 ex-ministers to find that church conflict is a leading cause for pastors to leave the ministry, and the most common cause of conflict is the "pastoral leadership style." Authoritarian or arbitrary leadership styles have become less acceptable: "Clergy who are new to a given community need to prove their wisdom and leadership through their actions; they cannot expect to be accepted as community leaders *a priori*."

An internet age undoubtedly exacerbates these tensions. Redeemer University College chaplain Dr. Syd Hielema pointed out that in an electronic world, seekers can live-stream or podcast their favourite all-star preachers, making it "hard for the local Joe to compete." CRC folks electronically connect with resources outside their tradition — whether they have a preference for evangelical, liberal or Catholic spiritualities, they can nurture what Hielema called "niche identities" on-line; this makes a local CRC congregation a very diverse group! One pastor reported that a critical congregation member sent him sermons from the mega-pastor Charles Price, saying "Now this is anointed preaching!" Couple that virtual spiritual influence with the dissolving of ethnic glue, and the preacher is the only symbol of



unity left for a congregation: he or she is the pressure point for a group of people with less in common than they assume.

Mark Chaves' book (see sidebar) offers some sobering conclusions at the end of his chapter on leadership: "I would not say that religious leadership faces a time of acute crisis. I would say, however, that the broad picture portrays a professional group that has lost ground in recent decades when it comes to its reputation, social prominence and attractiveness as a career choice for young people. These trends are long-term, and it is difficult to see how they might be reversed."

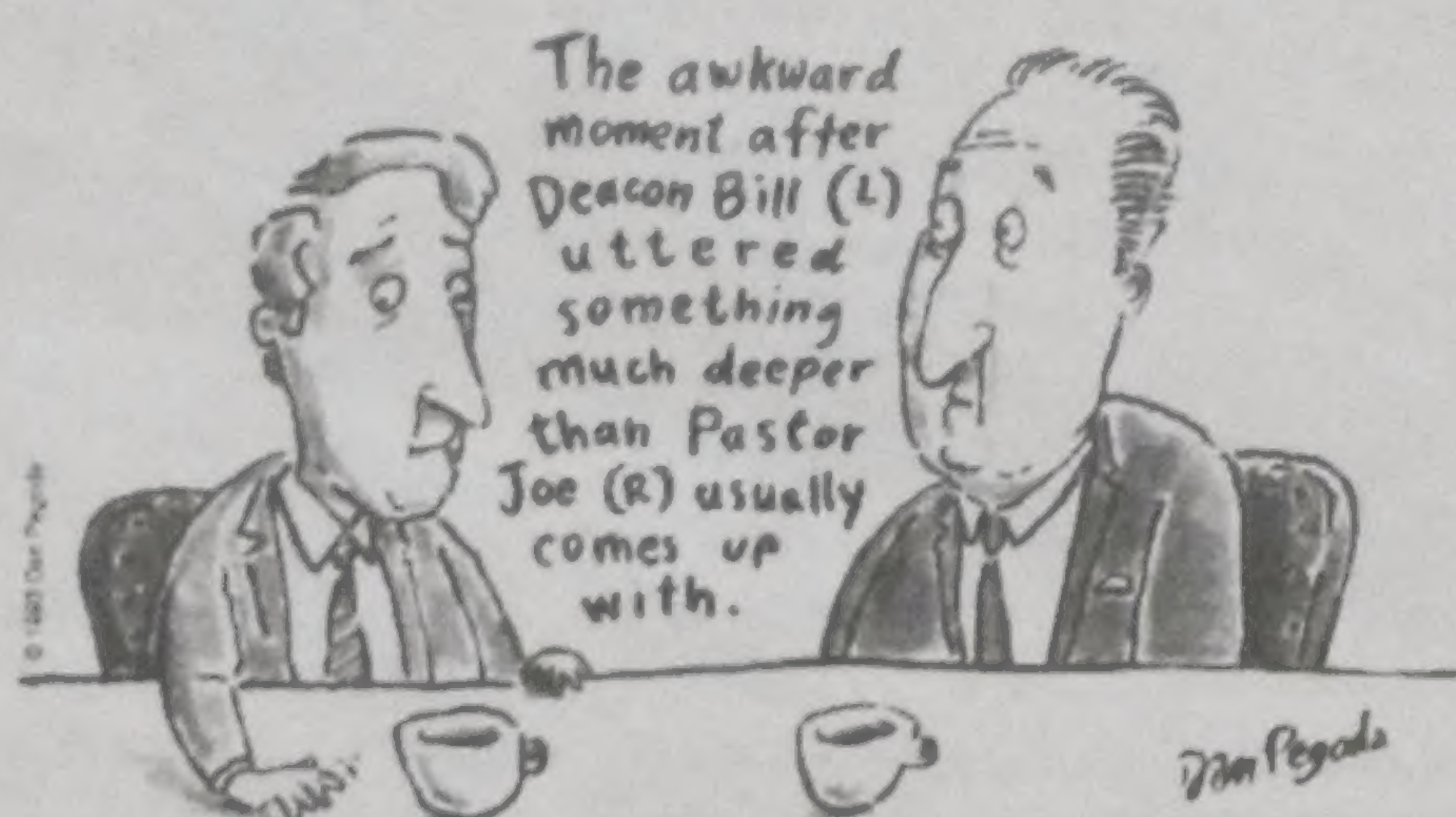
The positive side is two-fold: first of all, leadership implosion is not just a CRCNA ailment — it's symptomatic of the mainstream church in the West. Secondly, I would argue that the de-professionalization of the clergy offers an opportunity for shared servant leadership in the church.

See *Fractured flocks* on p.16

Priesthood of believers

"Open the pulpit to laity," said one male congregant. "The clergy is too possessive of the pulpit." Statistics show pastors are no longer "the brightest and best" among us: Mark Chaves writes in *American Religion: Contemporary Trends* (Princeton, 2010) that the GRE scores of ministers are way down from decades ago. Apparently the ministry is a less attractive profession (20 percent of freshmen expected to go into clergy during the Civil War, in 1960 it was 1 percent and now it's 0.3 percent in the U.S.). The clergy is aging (on average, with more women and more second career candidates). To be sure, a minister's intelligence and age are not as important as his character, competence and conviction, but the profession is radically changing.

P. Shuurman

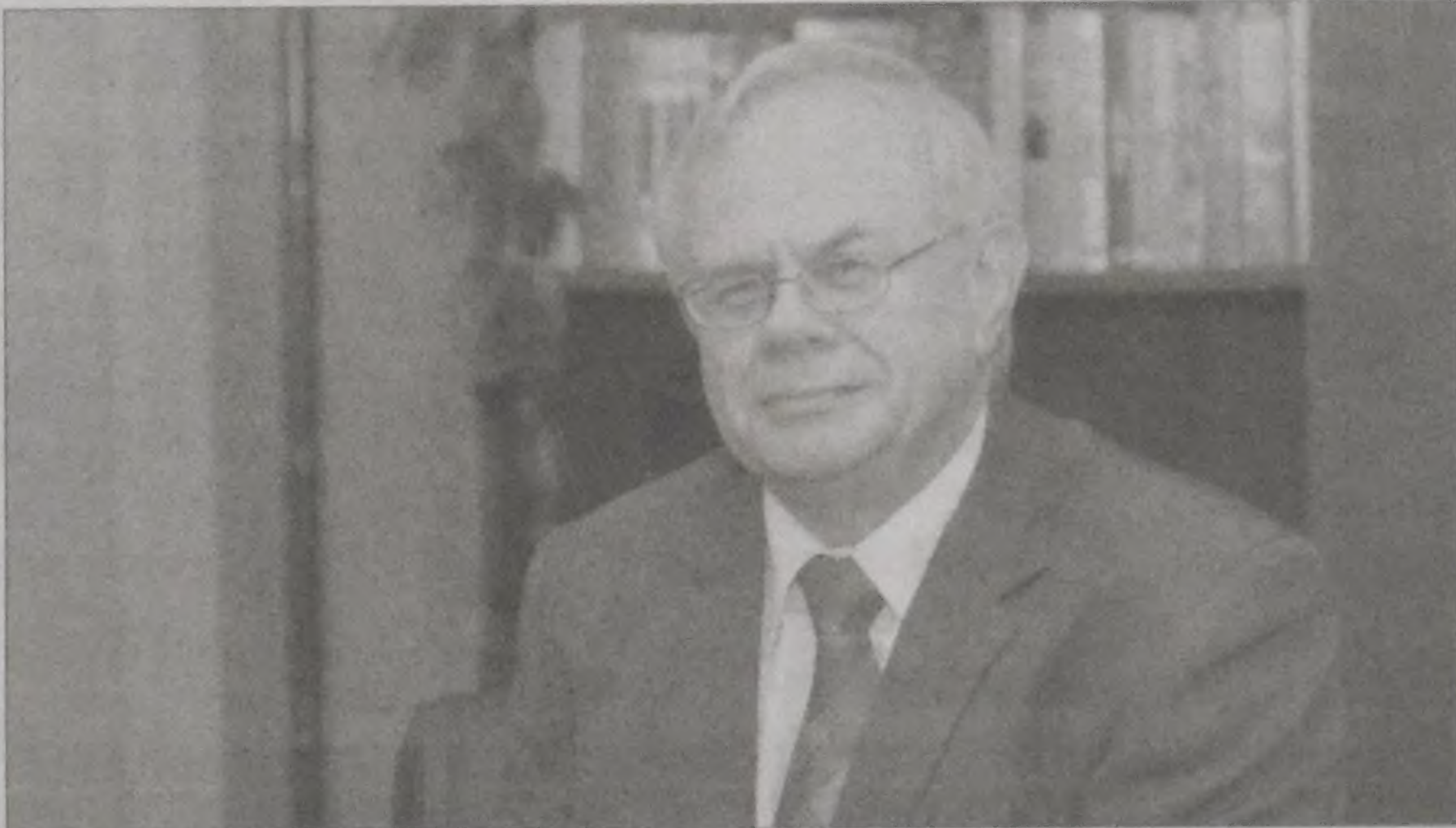


A Senior Pastor returns

Ron Rupke

There was an air of excitement as the Maranatha CRC in Belleville, Ont. began Sunday morning worship for the first time in the new year 2013. During a service at which a guest pastor preached on the theme of confession and forgiveness, the congregation learned that their Senior Pastor, Rev. John Visser, would be returning to the pulpit after a six-month long suspension from office. Associate pastor Dave Botting invited Rev. Visser to join him at the front of the sanctuary as he made the announcement, and the congregation responded with a standing ovation. Pastor John Visser has served

the congregation at Maranatha Belleville since 1985. During his time of leadership there, the congregation has grown significantly, relocated to a multi-use ministry centre in a downtown location and developed a Healing Ministry which employs several full-time staff members. Rev. Visser has published several books showing biblical realities of blessings and curses in the lives of real people in the Maranatha church community. In recent years, some members of the congregation and others questioned the counseling and healing ministry, and criticized the pastor's relationship with a publishing company owned by members



Rev. Visser resumed preaching in Jan. after a six-month suspension.

of the pastor's family. The controversy worked its way through the church council, a series of decisions

by Classis Quinte, a review by the CRC's Judicial Code Committee, and finally a decision by the CRC

Synod in 2012. During the second half of 2012, Rev. Visser underwent a "readiness for ministry" assessment. Meanwhile the church council engaged the services of a consultant to review the practices of its Healing Ministry, implemented his recommendations, and arranged for on-going oversight of the Healing Ministry Centre. In a press release announcing pastor Visser's return to ministry, the Board of Trustees of the Christian Reformed Church expressed "the sincere hope and prayer that healing may come to all who were affected, and all who experienced brokenness and hurt." Ron Roupke lives in Cobourg, Ont.

One more pastor *continued*

New members – community members who had joined to be part of a Reformed body with a missional calling – were troubled. "Can their family make the adjustments so quickly? Is this fair to him? What did he do wrong? I don't understand why this is happening." Old members – the Dutch immigrants who had been part of the founding congregation in the 1960s – were also troubled. "Why is he putting us through this? Why did he stay so long? So much money. Surely he can find a new job sooner than that. How can we call a new pastor if we're paying him so much? I don't understand why this is happening this way." The new members continued singing on the praise team, teaching Sunday School and leading in the community garden initiative for another year. "Why won't anyone explain to us why they wanted the pastor to leave?" they asked. "We've had two congregational



"How can we call a new pastor if we're paying the old one so much?"

meetings since the pastor left, but never talk about where God is leading our church and what is our identity. How can we belong here?" And they left for another church. "I knew that they weren't going to stick with our church," said an elder's wife. "They never did really understand or fit in." "I thought I'd try going to the Baptist church near my apartment," said a CR young adult who had just moved to town. The CR church is having troubles, isn't it? My aunt says it's bad. I don't want to step into the middle of anything."

Something is certainly in crisis as pastors and congregations part ways in bitterness, disappointment and frustration. But maybe it is not really "leadership" that is in crisis, though a body or a person with the authority to step in and sort out issues would help some congregations. Certainly using Article 17 with open and prayerful classical support can be helpful. But perhaps it is our sense for how to live together in love that is in crisis. We are called to live with "humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love..." (Eph. 4:3). But we often wait too long to share our concerns and are impatient when we should listen to others. Scars of distrust and anger distort everyone after an unhealthy parting – newer members, long-time members, the pastor and his family, council members, young Christians. More humble and gentle conversation, more patience toward others and more commitment to put up with one another in love – and perhaps fewer pastors would be asked to leave and fewer church members would wonder why others were dissatisfied.

Virginia Miller Lettinga, together with Neil Lettinga, retired Christian Reformed Chaplain at the University of Northern BC, is currently serving as half of the transitional pastor team for Telkwa CRC.



WE ARE LEAVING, BECAUSE WE DO NOT LIKE THE WAY THINGS ARE DONE

WE ARE ARRIVING, BECAUSE WE DO NOT LIKE THE WAY THINGS ARE DONE ELSEWHERE

CartoonChurch.com

Teacher, where's the minister?

Often the innocent victims of church conflicts are the young people of church, as this woman told us.

"I teach Sunday school, and we were talking about Abraham, the covenant and baptism. I had them bring in pictures of their baptism, to show they were part of God's family. As we were looking at those, one boy said, 'Where is Pastor Andrew*? He baptized me!' and the other kids started saying, 'He baptized me too!' and 'Why can't he be our pastor anymore?'"

"I felt so ill-equipped to answer that. So I just said, 'Pastor Andrew is still a believer, and he's preaching in lots of churches now.'"

"But we need him at our church!"

"We don't really know the new pastor!"

"It's a hard thing."

**Pastor Andrew is not his real name.*
Editor

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Editorials

A quiet revolution: Have you noticed it?



Adrian Van Giessen

From Victoria to Halifax a quiet but very real shift in self-identity is influencing much of the Canadian church. It's fueled in part by strident voices of dissatisfaction with the status quo. There's more to it than that, however. A fervent desire to make a significant dent in the growing apathy towards the gospel in western culture is also fueling this growing movement. Phrases such as "the emerging church" and "missional living" have become everyday vocabulary for those involved in this emerging shift.

In large part this movement is being spearheaded by young evangelicals, but its growing list of adherents easily cross denominational lines, breaking down many 20th century stereotypes that have divided those mainly focusing on evangelism and proclamation from those more interested in issues of social justice and diaconal ministry. These zealous emerging leaders are no longer content to keep the church inside of her safe walls, but are leading a quiet revolution that is exploring new ways to "be the church" in the middle of the marketplace. It's resulting in some out of the box experiments. Mostly under the radar, this missional reformation is influencing many of our local Christian Reformed (CR) churches as well.

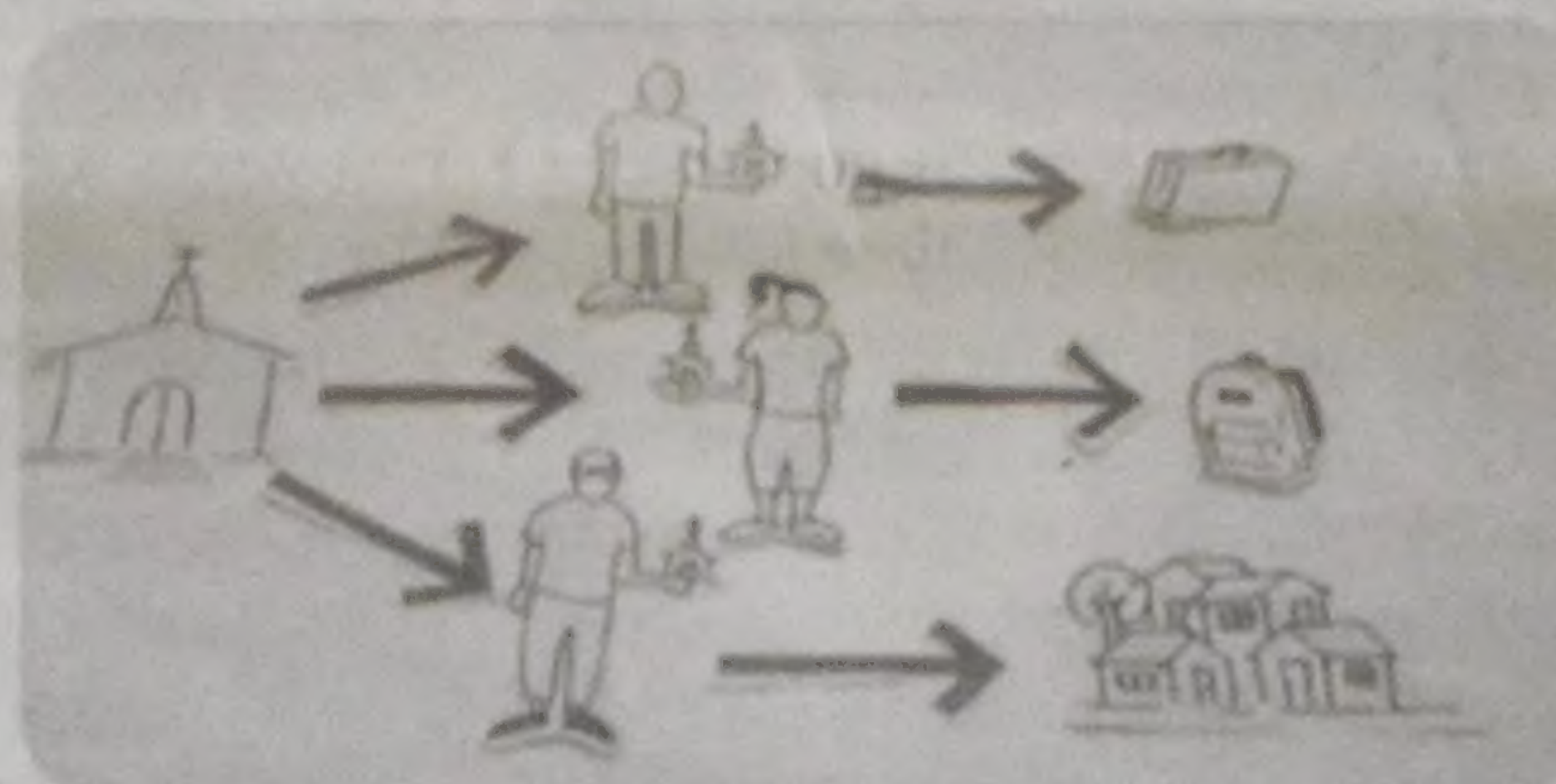
As a Christian Reformed Home Missions staff person working in Canada, I get to have a front row seat to what the Holy Spirit is stirring up in and through many of our churches and classes across eastern Canada. Amid the voices of worry and fear for the future of the CRC in Canada, some promising missional experiments are bubbling up from the local imaginations of our people. I thought I'd share a few snapshots with you.

Local Holy Spirit sightings

In Charlottetown, PEI, our one and only CRC in the province is facing a wonderful problem. They are growing out of their building. What's somewhat unique is the way this congregation is using their "problem" as an opportunity to explore doing something creative for God's kingdom. They decided that

they would set aside a year to discern God's call for their congregation. Besides considering whether to build an addition and start a second service, they are asking some other tough missional questions. Is God perhaps calling them to help start a second CRC congregation on the Island? Could they, as a regional church that draws people from all around the Island, become a church formed around mid-sized communities based on where their people already live? What might it look like for them to become a gathered and a scattered church is now a part of their discernment process.

In quite a different setting, in the economically poor east side of downtown Hamilton, a small dedicated church called New Hope is prayerfully working to be Jesus' hands and feet in that neighbourhood. This amazing small group of kingdom-minded folk has helped create a much needed neighbourhood association. They've started a bike co-op. They've sponsored neighbourhood parties and they help run a much-needed local soccer program for kids in the community. Each Sunday their small, lay-person-led congregation gather together and invite the east Hamilton community to join them as they worship the God of mission. Their dedicated passion and their committed desire to be Christ's hands and feet in that place is inspiring to see.



The missional reformation brings church outside of her safe walls.

In the west part of Classis Quinte, the Classis Home Missions Committee, in partnership with Home Missions, has begun an initiative called Mission Activators. This growing group of pastors and lay persons share a passion to see the CRCs in the Durham region working and flourishing together to see God's mission multiply through them. As a result of their efforts, several congregations are working together to train up missionaries in their congregations, and a number of other initiatives are underway to help CRC congregations explore ways to do missional ministry around the burgeoning university campuses in their city.

Exciting stuff, and it's happening right here in our own backyard! God's Spirit is on the move in the Canadian CRC! To be sure, this isn't the whole story of the CRC in Canada. There still are too many places where our congregations are discouraged, where our memberships are getting older and where our vision is limited to nostalgia or to mere survival. However, let's not be mistaken. Borrowing the words of C.S. Lewis in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the great lion Aslan is on the move in Canada. When the King of this universe is on the move, participating in his mission of bringing hope and healing to the world he loves is the brightest hope for our future. Does your local congregation have anything more important to do than that? ➤

Adrian Van Giessen is the Christian Reformed Home Missions Regional Team Leader for Eastern Canada.

Hanging onto hallelujah: Five reasons I love the CRC



Angela Reitsma Bick

"What's wrong with our church?" I've heard it too often. Conversations start out harmlessly, touching on Christian Reformed church (CRC) related news. But whether it's a Christian school in decline or a budget shortfall, we frequently end up on a low note. There are plenty of choices: a volunteer shortage, the Genesis debate, another pastor let go.

But while these challenges remain, I believe that good things are happening in the CRC, and they are worth mentioning. Here are five reasons why I love my church – that community of broken believers calling ourselves Christian Reformed and hanging onto hallelujah.

Kids are people

Our church acknowledges that children can do more than look cute and say "Jesus" to every question. Kids in the CRC are able to engage fully in the life of the church, as Synod made official last June. Upon the recommendation of the Faith Formation Committee, "all baptized members are welcome to the table," even those who have not made public profession of faith. Members who partake will simultaneously learn about the creeds and confessions of the Reformed heritage. This makes the link between baptism and profession of faith stronger.

Youth are also invited to participate at Synod. John Kloosterman, 21, attended last year. "I think I had a better chance of being listened to as a young adult representative," he told me, "than I would if I had been a delegate."

Women can serve

Our church recognizes the spiritual gifts of women. There's no question that this discussion was a brutal battle that left the ranks of the CRC decimated. Committees have been reporting to Synod on the divisive issue of women in office longer than I've been alive. But I am grateful to be part of a denomination that affirms the ordination of women, elects female elders and uses the gifts of women in a wide variety of ways to bless the church. We can mark progress, even if it seems slow. Today, 52 women hold the office of Pastor in the CRCNA – roughly six percent.

"I have female students who come and talk with me about ministry," Assistant Professor of Preaching at Calvin Seminary Rev. Mary Hulst says, "and most of the time they want to know what ministry is like – not what it's like to be a woman in ministry. This is a big shift! And when I am invited to preach somewhere now, it is because I am a preacher, not because I am a woman and a novelty."

Hands and feet

Our church follows the instruction Peter received from Jesus to "feed my sheep" in both senses of the word. We have a rich history of diaconate work. With our ministry shares, the CRC responds to that call by addressing the spiritual and physical needs of people at home and around the world. A humble 300,000 member denomination spreads an incredible "\$25+ million fund for missionary programs, church plants . . . and media outreach in over 200 countries" (*You add. God multiplies*) – all to God's glory and only because of his grace. We are just the errand runners from Jesus (2 Cor. 4:6), and, as James KA Smith describes it, "panting for benediction" ourselves.

Engaged politically

Our church works to bring God's wisdom to earthly rulers. We echo David's cry: "Is this any way to run a country?" (Ps. 58:1). And it's not echoed rhetorically; we mean it. Thanks to the work of policy pioneers like Gerald Vandezande, there's a clear sense that, as Christians, we can influence the political landscape. Justice issues matter to us. We're engaged in public policy through the Centre for Public Dialogue and the Office of Social Justice.

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Letters

More energy tips: Perpetually hot water is unnecessary

I've been following Jordan Hoogendam's column on our energy use (Dec. 10, 2012; Jan. 14, 2013). Specific suggestions are helpful, and in that vein I offer this: Following a sister's example, I regularly turn off my hot water tank. Our power rates in Nova Scotia are high and constantly climbing, but the environmental impact of using finite resources motivates me even more. When I want a shower, I switch the circuit breaker governing the hot water tank to ON. Forty-five minutes yields sufficient hot water for a shower and washing a batch of dishes. The rest of the time the heater is at rest. Having a wood stove helps: a soup pan of water gets hot in no time. Even using an electric stove for this purpose uses little power compared to heating a 30-gallon tank. I've been doing the laundry in cold water for years already. My power bill has gone down rather than going up with rate increases.

My approach to hot water is suited to small households, but if enough of us do it, the planet will benefit. The majority of the world's population gets along quite well without our wasteful approach to hot water, and they're not all dirty and unkempt.

Anne van Arragon Hutten
Kentville, N.S.

Hanging onto hallelujah *continued*

We pay attention locally, too. In Barrie, for example, a proposal to build a downtown casino was defeated in January in part because the local council of churches lobbied against it.

"When the CRC in Canada speaks to government leaders," former Director of Canadian Ministries Bruce Adema said at the recent C3 Forum, "our contributions are welcomed because MPs expect words from the CRC to be thoughtful, respectful, relevant and wise."

Quick to hear

Our church is ready to show God's love by paying attention. Maybe it's a cultural shift; maybe it's genuine. But I sense a new and welcome willingness to listen in our denomination. Faith Alive curriculum asks kids how it would feel to be healed of leprosy. Visiting pastors and elders are ready to hear how we're doing, not deliver a sermon. Committees – which are, as a friend quipped, our form of small group – rattle ideas around until the exchange produces a worthwhile pearl of insight. Organizations like the Centre for Public Dialogue build relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people with projects like the current cross-Canada art tour.

"Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger" (James 1:19). That's what I saw in January at the C3 Forum, when 120 CRC members – pastors, leaders and lay people – traveled to Toronto from all corners of Canada. That auditorium was full of people who care passionately about this denomination; the room was spilling over with suggestions for how to better bring the gospel to every Canadian community. Sure, there are problems – but here was a willingness to discuss those problems. Yes, we've been a prideful bunch – but listen to at least 10 people warn against that. Maybe the time is ripe for something different.

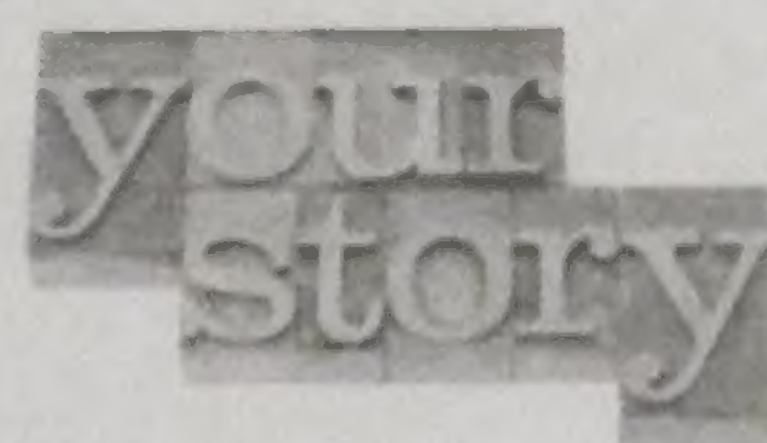
In any conversation, it's important to ask the right questions. It's a lesson I've given my kids: don't ask "What's for lunch?" but "What can I do to help?"

Maybe I'm naïve. But maybe those negative conversations can be upended. Instead of asking "What's wrong with our church?" let's try "What can I do to help?"

Angela Reitsma Bick was raised in the CRC, attended Free Methodist and Presbyterian churches for several years, and is currently a member of First CRC in Barrie, Ont.

What's your story?

Fourth Annual Christian
Courier Short Story Contest!



I: Send in your original short fiction (1000 to 3000 words) on any theme by May 1, 2013. First prize receives \$100 and publication in a summer issue of *Christian Courier*. Please note that this contest is for fictional short stories, not essays or articles. Second prize receives a year's subscription. All stories must be submitted electronically to cathy@christiancourier.ca. Entries over the word limit will not be considered.

II: Our readers 8 to 14 years of age can participate in the category for youth. There will be two divisions: junior (Grades 3-5) and Intermediate (Grades 6-8). Send your short stories (500-1000 words) to cathy@christiancourier.ca by May 1, 2013. Entries over the word limit will not be considered. The first-place winner in each division will win a gift certificate to Toys'R'Us valued at \$50. All stories will be considered for publication in *CC*.

Why we cannot understand evil

Thank you Lloyd Rang, for opening our eyes! ("Speaking from the heart about Newtown," Jan. 14, 2013). The comment of some prominent Christian leaders that the shooting of innocent children at Newtown was God's punishment for removing prayer from schools shows the repugnance of harnessing God to political agendas.

Human attempts to read the mind of God makes me think of the man born blind and the

question of who had sinned, the man or his parents. Jesus rejects attempts to pin blame (John 9:3). Job takes the same position.

Ultimately, the troubling question how a good God can allow evil is not open to human understanding. We are called to trust that God is good! Peter Kreeft writes somewhere that time is the answer to why God permits evil. I think Kreeft means understanding may come, eventually. Our puny slice of life is the first

frame of the movie and until the last frame is shown it is best to withhold judgment.

This column in particular made me appreciate the importance of *CC* in fostering a Christian mind in regards to culture and current events. The column is also a reminder that social media can't replace the importance of thoughtful journalism.

Nick Loenen
Richmond, B.C.

Westminster Catechism not abstract or outdated

I agree with Hendrikus Berkhof and Richard Mouw ("My only comfort," Jan. 14, 2013) that the Heidelberg Catechism "has a wonderfully contemporary tone of personal authenticity." However, I find it odd that Mouw (who "loves the scope of Reformed understanding of the cosmic rule of Jesus Christ") should find the Westminster Shorter Catechism's emphasis on the glory of God to be an "abstract theological formula from the past." There is nothing abstract about glorifying God and enjoying him forever, as countless evangelical writers from non-Reformed backgrounds have discovered.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century Princeton theologian, B.B. Warfield, found the Heidelberg to be overly subjective and people-centred compared to the God-centred approach of Westminster. Personally, I find Westminster to be more theologically precise, while the Heidelberg is more pastoral. As Kevin DeYoung has written in *The Good News We Almost Forgot*, "Heidelberg starts with grace. Westminster starts with glory. We'd be hard-pressed to think of two better words to describe the biblical revelation."

J. Cameron Fraser
Lethbridge, Alta.



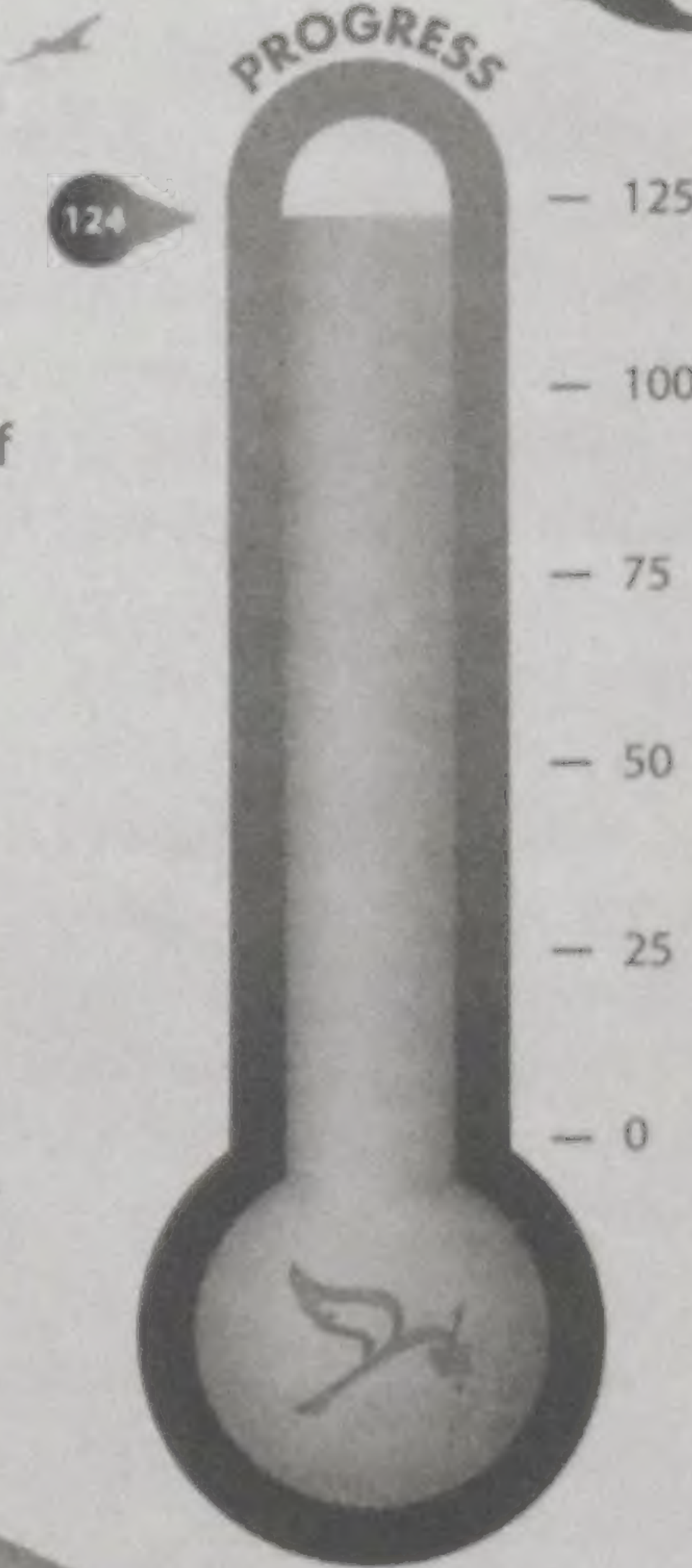
Justice issues matter to us.

Christian Courier's Carry Us Forward Campaign

This issue marks the end of our Carry Us Forward Campaign, and it's my pleasure to welcome over 100 new subscribers to the ranks of faithful *CC* readers. Thanks to each one of you who gave a gift subscription, set up a free trial or encouraged someone new to take a look at *Christian Courier*.

Read, engage, repeat... and join us in God's renewing work within his fallen creation.

~Angela Reitsma Bick, Editor



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News

'Humans are a plague on the earth' says filmmaker David Attenborough

LONDON (LifeSiteNews.com) – Well-known filmmaker, TV presenter and environmental activist Sir David Attenborough has a dire warning for humanity: we need to die off of our own volition or "the natural world" will do the job for us.

Attenborough, famous for hosting numerous nature documentaries over the span of the past six decades, told Britain's Radio Times that human beings are a plague on the earth and the only way to save the planet is to limit human population growth.

"It's coming home to roost over the next 50 years or so. It's not just climate change; it's sheer space, places to grow food for this enormous horde. Either we limit our population growth or the natural world will do it for us."

Attenborough is best known for his *Life on Earth* series of wildlife documentaries.

Attenborough's statement reiterated a previous statement he made extolling the virtues of saving the environment by eliminating people. "Maybe it is time that instead of controlling the environment for the benefit of the population, we should control the population to ensure the survival of the environment," Attenborough wrote in



He wants the British gov't to enforce a two-child policy.

a letter to John Guillebaud, professor of family planning and reproductive health at University College London. Guillebaud is also a patron of the UK-based "Population Matters," a pro-abortion radical environmentalist organization formerly known as the Optimum Population Trust.

In 2009 Attenborough himself became a patron of Population Matters. The group has advocated for a 50 percent reduction of Britain's population by using a government-enforced two-child policy like the one-child policy of the People's Republic of China.

A 2009 report by the Optimum Population Trust (Population Matters) that appeared in the *Guardian* advised that people in wealthy first-world countries should "offset" the carbon cost of their jet-setting lifestyles by paying to prevent the births of poor children in the developing world. The Optimum Population Trust (OPT) claimed that the 10 metric tons of carbon emitted by a single return flight from London to Sydney, Australia, could be "offset" by "enabling the avoidance of one unwanted birth in a country such as Kenya." The report concluded that "family planning methods should be a primary tool in the optimum strategy for reducing carbon emissions."

OPT insisted that only "unwanted" children would be targeted for elimination by the scheme that would provide artificial contraception and abortion to those in developing countries who currently cannot obtain it. ➤

Ottawa: Gay activist tears down campus 'Free Speech Wall' just after it's put up

OTTAWA (DC/LSN) – A "Free Speech Wall" set up by Carleton University Students for Liberty was quickly destroyed by a fellow student who described himself as an "anti-homophobia campaigner."

Carleton Students for Liberty (SFL) founder Ian CoKehyeng explained that a Free Speech Wall consists of large sheets of paper set up in a high traffic area on campus where students can write anything they like. But just after students set up the wall on January 21 in the high-traffic Unicentre Galleria, a fellow student, Arun Smith, tore off the paper with the messages left by other students and destroyed the framework to which the paper was fastened.

Smith defended his actions on his Facebook page. The Free Speech Wall was offensive to homosexuals, he wrote, because someone *might* write something to which homosexuals object. "In organizing the 'Free Speech Wall,' the Students for Liberty have forgotten that liberty requires liberation, and this liberation is prevented by providing space for either more platitudes, or for the expression of hate," Smith wrote. He called the wall a "war zone" and "another in a series of acts of violence" against homosexual rights.

Paradoxically, the messages that Smith destroyed contained more approval of homosexuality than disapproval. Compared to many pro-gay messages there was only one comment – "Traditional marriage is awesome" – which might be construed as touching on the homosexual agenda. Another message said, "Abortion is murder."

'Nothing safe about censorship'

CoKehyeng said the SFL's stand against censorship meant that everyone should be free to express their opinion on the wall without fear of running afoul of school administration or being attacked by those who disagree. He said the majority of students support the wall; the main opposition "comes from a vocal minority of students who are concerned with creating so-called safe spaces on campus. While this is a noble goal, there is nothing safe about censorship."



Ian CoKehyeng, Carleton U. Students for Liberty

closed and scary place where he and other vulnerable groups are constantly under attack. . . . I urge Carleton Students for Liberty to re-erect the wall and encourage those who sympathize with the need to tear it down to participate along with everybody else. I don't think asking CUSA [Carlton U. Student Assoc.] to punish those opposing the wall will be constructive, but inviting engagement might be."

John Carpay, president of the Calgary-based Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms (JCCF) which is a co-sponsor of the Free Speech Wall, praised the Students for Liberty for encouraging free speech at Carlton. But he also pointed out the inconsistency in the school administration's handling of the campus vandalism committed by Arun Smith in comparison to their decision to arrest pro-life students for trespassing when they attempted to set up a display of the Genocide Awareness Project.

"It's good that Carlton University allows the Free Speech Wall," Carpay continued, "but it will be interesting to see how they respond to Arun Smith having publicly admitted to having damaged and stolen someone's property on campus, when they arrested and handcuffed pro-life students for wanting to peacefully express their opinions on campus. It will be interesting to see whether Carlton imposes any consequences on Smith."

In the JCCF's 2012 Campus Freedom Index, a report on the state of free speech at Canadian universities, Carlton was rated among the worst in the country. The introduction to the Index states that one of the biggest threats to free speech in

Janet Neilson, director of the Institute for Liberal Studies, argued that Smith's act of vandalism stems from his worldview of homosexuals as victims. "It is clear from Mr. Smith's [Facebook] note that for him the world is a small,

Turkish leader urges women: have more children

Ankara, Turkey (ANSamed) – Turkey's Islamic populist Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has called on Turkish women to have "at least four or five children" in the name of the country's "grandeur" and faster economic growth, the *Hurriyet* newspaper reports.



PM Erdogan says children are good for the economy.

Erdogan had previously asked Turkish women to have three children. Erdogan and wife, Emine, have four.

Sixty percent of Turkey's population is under 30, something the prime minister has proudly stressed. But experts have noted that a more pro-

perous lifestyle following the country's decade-long economic boom could bring Turkish couples to have fewer children, a trend seen across Western countries.

Speaking at a wedding, Prime Minister Erdogan called for "four or five kids" per family. "If we look at birth rate trends, forecasts on the years between 2037 and 2040 are alarming," he said. Having a large family, he asserted, "is of great importance for the future of our nation."

Turkey currently has a population of 75 million which is expected to grow to 100 million by 2025. The country aims to become one of the world's top ten economic powers. It is currently 17th on the list. ➤

U.S.: Pro-life memorial at Catholic U. trashed on anniversary of Roe v. Wade

Marian Van Til, with files from CWN and YAF

CHICAGO – A temporary memorial to the unborn, erected on a Catholic university campus on the 40th anniversary of the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court abortion decision, was vandalized and destroyed that same day.

A student group called Young Americans for Freedom hosted a "Flags for Life" project at DePaul University, the largest Catholic university in the U.S., with 25,000 students. At 7 a.m. on January 22, YAF club members set up 500 flags (half blue, half pink) to symbolize just some of the babies' lives lost every day in the U.S. through abortion. Almost 56 million – equivalent to nearly the entire population of Italy or Britain – have died in the 40 years since the constitutionality of the abortion-legalizing law was upheld.

At about 5 p.m. on January 22, YAF chairman Kristopher Del Campo and other board members went to remove the flag display. What they found startled them, said Del Campo. The flags had been removed and stuffed into trash bins inside and outside the entrance to the DePaul library. He contacted campus safety officials, who are reviewing videotape evidence that three or four females removed the flags at about 4:30. The incident is still being investigated.

"It is a sad thing to see that liberal-minded students aren't more tolerant, and don't respect the views of those who respect the lives of the unborn," said Del Campo. "Especially on a campus . . . that is a Roman Catholic institution." ➤

Canada comes from universities that condone illegal activities on the part of people who interfere with, and effectively shut down, the events and speech of people they disagree with, noting that Section 430 of the Criminal Code makes it an offence to obstruct, interrupt or interfere with any person in the lawful use, enjoyment, or operation of property. ➤

News

Faith Alive seeks families to test new devotional book



A Lenten selection is now available online.

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (CRCNA) – Faith Alive Christian Resources, the Christian Reformed Church's publishing ministry, is looking for families to field-test a sample of *Come to Me*, a new prayer and devotional book.

Come to Me is a venture designed to bring families closer together. It will include readings for all 365 days of the year. Now in development by Faith Alive, it is based on the format of *Seeking God's Face*.

That earlier book was Faith Alive's bestselling prayerbook for adults by Philip F. Reinders.

Like the earlier book, *Come to Me* arose out of hundreds of years of tradition in which Christians have observed the "daily office" – prayers offered to God at regular times of the day. The material in *Come to Me* specifically focuses

on making prayers and devotions a natural, doable and meaningful part of family life.

In order to ensure that the book will be a valuable resource, Faith Alive is asking families to field-test a sample of *Come to Me*. To do this, Faith Alive asked authors Lora Copley and Elizabeth VanderHaagen, both parents of young children, to create a sample of the book to field-test during Lent.

In order to participate as a field-test family access to a computer is needed. Your name, address, size of family and denominational affiliation can be left on the form at the website faithalive.wufoo.com/forms by March 24. In return, a PDF file of the sample book can be downloaded by participants. The materials can be printed or used on a device such as an iPad or Kindle Fire.

Brief interactive readings for Ash Wednesday through Easter Sunday, as well as a link to an online evaluation form, will also be included. As a thank-you, Faith Alive will send the first 50 people who complete the evaluation after using the sample a complimentary copy of *Come to Me* when it is published.

Ontario CRC pastor 'builds relationships at the convenience store'

MILTON, Ontario (CRCNA) – John Bouwers, a pastor in the fast-growing city of Milton, Ont., intentionally goes to his neighbourhood convenience store for his daily newspaper. He has done this over the last several months to build "faith-engaging" relationships with three Muslim men who work in the store.

It has started to work, says Bouwers, pastor of Crosstowne, a Christian Reformed Home Missions-supported church plant.

Nadim (not his real name) invited Bouwers to come to his mosque and observe a service there. In turn, Nadim attended Crosstowne's Thanksgiving celebration. Ibrahim (not his real name) works a midnight shift. He gave Bouwers an English copy of the Qu'ran to read, and they've since discussed each other's beliefs. Bouwers has concluded that "Ibrahim is, in all but name, a Christ follower."

Bouwers says that intentionally going to the store to get his newspaper is an example of Crosstowne's approach. "The big thing we talk about at Crosstowne is allowing the rhythms of our life to engage people, grow friendships and bless people."

"Brother John," as his Muslim friends call him, is amazed at how many people of different faiths and backgrounds he has met in the community since he moved to Milton a year



Allow the rhythms of your life to engage and bless people, Bouwers says.

or so ago. "The biggest thing we are trying to do is start a movement and the church is planted inside the movement," he says. "Usually, you think of mission or outreach as an outgrowth of an established church."

Crosstowne, he says, has a capstone motto that says, "Turn strangers into friends," and is already focused on missions.

Bouwers and members of Crosstowne's community don't meet every Sunday but do meet several times a month. Half the time, they host an event that's "easy to bring someone along to," he says. This might mean bowling, cards or a service opportunity, while the other meetings tend to be for discipleship and accountability.

"People are hungry for community," Bouwers says. "At Crosstowne, we want to bring people into community, not necessarily into church. We want to grow holistic disciples and glorify God."

Belgium: Adult twins, disabled but not ill, are euthanized

LEUVEN, Belgium (TCI) – Identical 45 year-old Belgian twins who were not terminally ill have been killed by lethal injection in a case believed to be the first of its kind.

Marc and Eddy Verbessem, who were born deaf, sought euthanasia after discovering they were both going blind. They believed their lives would not be worth living if they could not see each other, according to another brother. A North American critic at mercator.net immediately pointed out, "Apparently the Verbessem twins never heard of Helen Keller, and what you can do with your life if you are blind and deaf."

It has emerged that the pair had to overcome strong resistance from their family to be killed. Their local hospital refused to euthanize them and raised doubts about whether their situation met the requirements of Belgian legislation.

Another way to deal with human frailty

A medical ethics professor agreed. Chris Gastmans, professor of medical ethics at the Roman Catholic University of Leuven asked, "Is this the only humane response that we can offer in such situations? I feel uncomfortable here as ethicist. Today it seems that euthanasia is the only right way to end life. And I think that's not a good thing. In a society

as wealthy as ours, we must find another, caring way to deal with human frailty."

Under Belgian law a doctor must judge that a patient is unbearably suffering, and the patient must make clear their wish to be killed. However, in this case neither were suffering physical pain, nor were they terminally ill.

Their local hospital said the law is "clearly open to various interpretations," but warned that if any blind or deaf person is allowed to be killed then the country would be moving far away from what the legislation intended. On the other hand, Prof. Wim Distelmans, the doctor who allowed the killing, asserted, "It is certain that the twins met all the conditions for euthanasia."

Belgium is the second country in the world, after the Netherlands, to legalize euthanasia. Last month it was revealed that Belgium is considering allowing children and Alzheimer's sufferers to ask to be euthanized. Dr Peter Saunders, director of UK-based campaign group Care not Killing, has warned, "Once you relax the law on euthanasia or assisted suicide, steady extension will follow as night follows day."

See p.20 for how Canadian laws may change.

CRC signs baptism agreement with Catholic Church

GRAND RAPIDS, Michigan (CRCNA) – The Christian Reformed Church and several other Reformed denominations joined with the Roman Catholic Church on January 29 to sign a historic agreement regarding their mutual beliefs about baptism.

The baptism agreement represents a significant breakthrough in ecumenical relations. Until now, the Catholic Church has not always recognized baptisms that took place in Reformed denominations. This was partly because of issues related to how the Trinity was referenced in the baptismal ceremony, according to a story in the *Austin-American Statesman*.

The agreement was the result of many years of careful, steady work on the part of the CRC and the other groups, and it cleared up the issue involving the Trinity.

Although the CRC Synod accepted and passed the document in 2011, it took until now for the formal ceremony involving all parties to take place. Replete with liturgy and a sprinkling of water as a sign of baptism, the ceremony at Saint Mary's Catholic Cathedral in downtown Austin, Texas, was part of the opening of the annual meeting of the interfaith group Christian Churches Together – a strong backer of what is called the "Common Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Baptism."

Rev. Joel Boot, executive director of the Christian Reformed Church, signed the agreement on behalf of the CRC. He also offered remarks on the significance of the agreement. "Together we affirm, as a sign of our unity and as a witness to ecumenical commitment, the practice of inviting the presence and, where appropriate, the participation of members of our respective communions in the celebration of Baptism. At the same time, we affirm our responsibility to respect the integrity of the distinct baptismal practices of the communions in which the rite of Baptism is administered..."

Moving toward unity?

Before Boot left for Texas he said, "I'm grateful that the CRC can be part of what is yet another move toward Christian unity. I am especially grateful for those in our denomination and in the other denominations who have come together and worked for so long on this joint statement on such a central element of our faith."

The other Reformed churches involved were the Reformed Church in America (RCA) and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The United Church of Christ, which has Reformed roots, was also involved. On behalf of Catholics, representatives of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops took part. Five Christian Reformed representatives participated in the discussions as part of what was called the Reformed-Catholic Dialogue.

After the signing ceremony, participants took part in a candlelight procession from the cathedral to nearby Central Presbyterian Church where there was a reception and a brief program. During the reception, the heads of the Reformed denominations had a chance to briefly say a few words about the significance of this agreement for their respective denominations.

The "Common Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Baptism" recognizes that a person baptized in the Catholic Church need not be baptized again if he or she joins a CRC congregation. Synod's decision formalizes a practice and view that has been held in the CRC for many years.

The document states, "Together, we affirm, as a sign of our unity and as a witness to ecumenical commitment, the practice of inviting the presence and, where appropriate, the participation of members of our respective communions in the celebration of Baptism."

Columns

Borderless

Brent van Staaldunen



Two jihads



What has four letters, starts with a "J," and can inflame with only a whisper?

Jihad might as well have four letters. You can't just drop it into civilized conversation without a flurry of furtive looks and hushed responses. The term jihad has taken on as much vitriol as racist epithets and swear words, thrown about with great abandon by those who know least about it, and whispered or qualified out of meaning by those who should know better.

My first exposure to jihad was typical. Stories of hijackers, armed resistance fighters and fanatical suicide bombers delivered with head shakes and disbelief at how far people will go to prove a point. Martyrs and struggle, *hour*i and paradise, *mujahideen* and bearded Taliban. 9/11 did little to expand the concept, either, merely adding American casualties to the mass murder CV of fundamentalist Islam.

But jihad is a more nuanced word than the media would have us believe. My continued education about the expanded definition of jihad took place in Kuwait over tea and gorgeous Afghan and Persian carpets. Husain, the carpet vendor, explained that jihad, in addition to the armed struggle against unbelievers, also means a Muslim's everyday efforts to live out the faith and struggle against sin.

My own jihad

At that point, I was still in the honeymoon phase of my immersive education about Islam, looking for counterpoint to suicide vests and fanaticism. Plus, he was trying to sell us carpets, so I think he had some well-rehearsed responses to the ignorant questions posed about the dangers of sourcing his wares from Iran and Afghanistan. Still, here was a palatable, unoffensive view of what the average Muslim believed and how he lived, and it resonated with me.

Everyday efforts to live out a faith? Struggle against sin? Those are my beliefs too.

The nicer version of the jihad narrative is also a refrain used by moderate Muslims, particularly ones who live in western societies trying to distance themselves from their fanatical cousins. However, having two versions does not mean one outshines the other. Moderate Muslims cannot with any authority or believability separate themselves from the explicit instructions in their holiest texts. They might abhor what fundamentalists like the Taliban or Al Qaeda are doing as much as anyone, but those freedom fighters are living out their interpretation of God's will.

And they can no more separate themselves from their own missteps or misdirected cousins than we can. We have two jihads also, whether we like it or not. At one extreme, Christians who prefer to work and live quietly never raise their voices above a whisper; at the other, Bible-benders spew hatred towards everyone different than themselves, declaring every tragedy as divine retribution for the world's sinful ways.

Their jihad is our jihad

It's not a pleasant thought, but Christian extremists are our cousins in faith too. Their version of Christian jihad might be repulsive, but the biblical precepts and texts they sow can be justified by their interpretation of scripture. They're using the same Bibles we are, the same ammunition, the same words twisted around themselves. Their jihad is our jihad.

I am not suggesting that we should do what they do and say what they say. However, Christianity enjoys the full spectrum of grey, and it is up to us to decide where on that spectrum to stand. I think most of us would declare ourselves as moderates, but it's not enough to separate ourselves from or shun our backward cousins. To do so merely further the schisms and fractures that divide us and

therefore serve the dark whims and desires of Satan himself.

Recent events in Mali have again spurred me to thinking about the j-word, as the media bombards us with scare-tales of jihadis and militants and a 7000km x 3000km swath of Islamic fundamentalism. But such a one-sided interpretation of that ancient and familiar concept quickly turns my thoughts to their moderates. How will they respond to those who would kill their backward cousins, and to the cousins themselves so that those fanatics don't carry the entire narrative?

Then my thoughts jump to the jihad of moderate Christians like myself: how will we carry our struggle against sin and the pursuit of daily faith to our backward cousins?

Brent (brentvans.com) and his wife Rosalee live in the Westdale area of Hamilton.



How will moderate Muslims ensure that fanatics don't carry the entire narrative?

Principalities & Powers

David Koyzis



I love the Hungarian people. Among their many national virtues, they boast some of the greatest musicians, such as Béla Bartók (1881-1945) and Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967), who did so much to shape 20th-century music by drawing on their country's unique folk idioms.

There is a substantial Reformed Christian minority in Hungary, and they are well known for their love of singing the Psalms. In fact, it can be justly argued that psalm-singing carried them through four decades of communist tyranny.

Last year saw the 450th anniversary of the completion of the Genevan Psalter. Although the Psalter's texts were originally written in French verse, they were quickly thereafter translated into a number of other languages, including German, Dutch, Czech and Hungarian. The remarkable polymath, Albert Szenczi Molnár (1574-1634), was responsible for the Hungarian version. A pastor, linguist, poet, writer and translator, Molnár (whose surname means *miller*) was born in Senec (Szenc), near the Slovak capital of Bratislava, and would come to exercise a formative influence on the development of the Hungarian language.

Molnár travelled widely during his life, visiting and studying in a number of European centres associated with the Reformation. His metrical translation of the Psalms was inspired by the German-language Psalter of Ambrosius Lobwasser and was published in Herbörn in 1607. (The Reformed Christian legal theorist Johannes Althusius had published his *Politics* in Herbörn a few years earlier but had moved to Emden before Molnár's arrival.) Molnár died in Kolozsvár in Hungarian Transylvania, now Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

Amazingly, Molnár is reputed to have completed his translation of the Genevan Psalms in less than 100 days, which must surely set a speed record, given that this would require him to translate at least a psalm-and-a-half per day. Molnár's texts have stood the test of time and are still sung by Hungarians today. The extent to which

Singing the Psalms through adversity: Hungary

they are sung can be judged by the increasing numbers of performances posted to such sites as youtube, the sheer number of which might lead the casual observer to assume that the entire Hungarian nation is organized into hundreds of thousands of choral groups.

One of the best-known of these is the Cantus choir of the Reformed College in Debrecen, a major centre of Reformed Christianity in eastern Hungary. The College was founded in 1538, and the Cantus in 1739. The Cantus has recorded choral performances of the Psalms, including Kodály's arrangements of Psalms 33, 50, 114, 121, 124, 126 and 150, whose continuing popularity appears to be undimmed by the passing of the years.

Hungary suffered much in the 20th century. In 1919, following its loss in the Great War, it was deprived of nearly three-quarters of its territory, leaving nearly a third of Hungarian-speakers in the new states of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, as well as in a newly enlarged Romania. During the Second World War it suffered under a pro-fascist government, followed by 40 years of communism, interrupted in 1956 by a failed effort at freedom quickly crushed by Soviet tanks. However, once Mikhail Gorbachev ended Moscow's sphere of influence over its "allies," Hungary was the first to move towards democ-

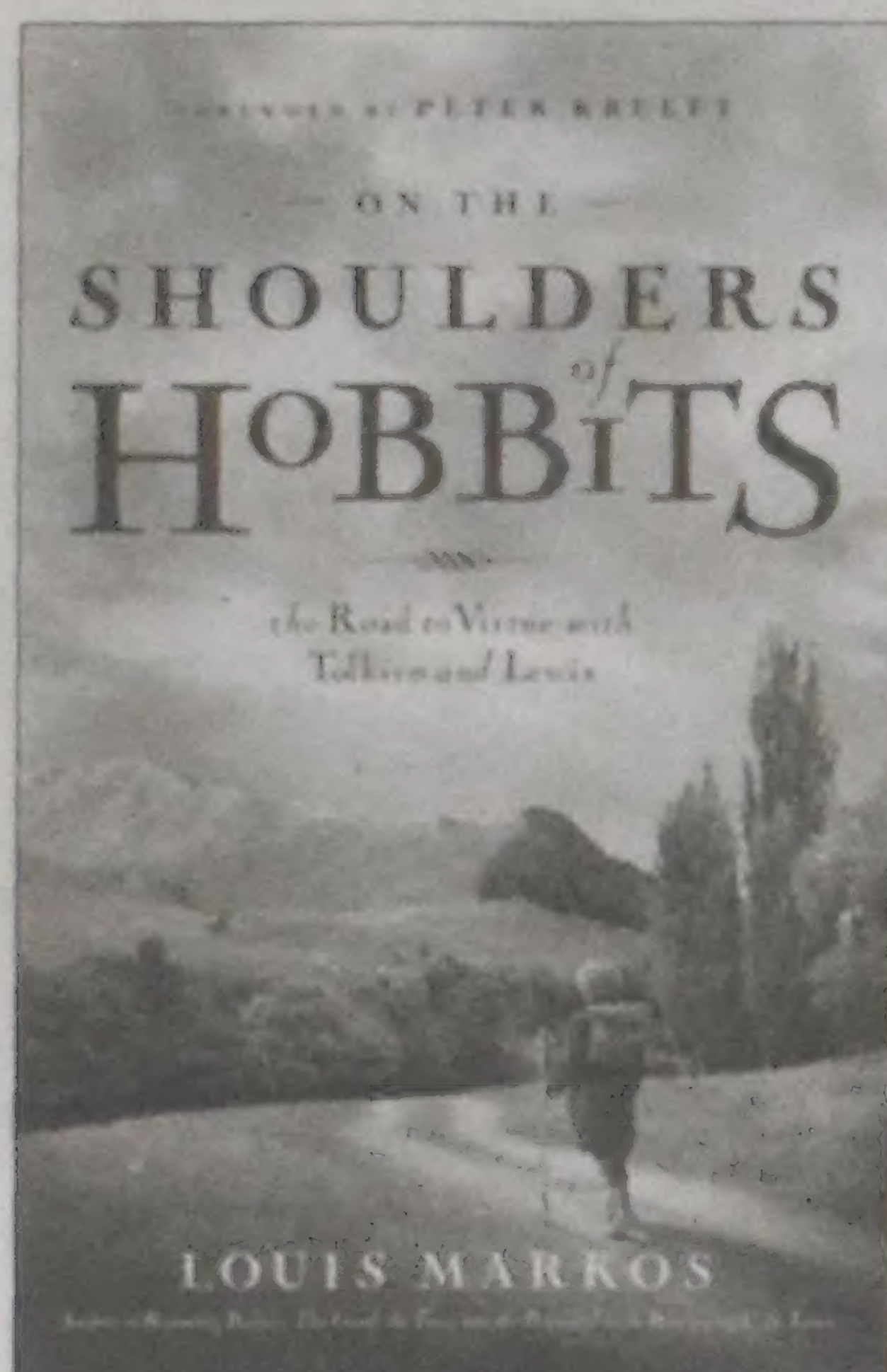
ocracy and to begin dismantling the Iron Curtain.

After the chains of oppression had fallen away, outsiders discovered that Hungarians were still singing from the *Genfi zsoltár*, their sturdy voices ringing out their complaints, petitions, thanksgivings and praises to God, despite the efforts of an officially atheistic régime at silencing them. Small wonder, then, that many of us admire the Hungarians, so many of whom have persisted in giving voice to God's Psalms in the face of such adversity.

David T. Koyzis has taught politics at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ont., for just over a quarter of a century. Links to the Hungarian Psalms and other resources can be found at kantus.hu/english/ and genevanpsalter.redeemer.ca.



Reviews



On the Shoulders of Hobbits: the Road to Virtue with Tolkien and Lewis
Louis Markos
Moody Publishers, 2012, 240 p.

By contrast, J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis' works of fiction celebrate and expound on many other virtues. Markos takes readers on a tour of *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Chronicles of Narnia* in order "to revive a more traditional – and more transcendent – understanding of virtue and vice and of human purpose and dignity" (15). After discussing the concepts of the Road and the Call in both Tolkien and Lewis, Markos divides his book into the Greco-Roman classical virtues (Justice, Temperance\ Self-control, Wisdom\Prudence and Courage\Fortitude) and theological virtues (Friendship, Faith, Hope and Love).

This reader found especially compelling Chapter 12, the discussion on "The Love that Pities and Forgives." Markos relates the story of Bilbo and Gollum in *The Hobbit*. When Bilbo finds the Ring, and discovers its power to make him invisible, he has an opportunity to kill the loathsome Gollum. But he doesn't. His decision to show pity has longstanding implications not only for his own life, but also for the lives of Frodo and Sam in *The Lord of the Rings*. The insights Markos relates in this chapter alone are worth the price of the book.

Though *On the Shoulders of Hobbits* is not written for children, Markos hopes that parents will take what they learn and discuss it with their kids, perhaps selecting a chapter per day for devotional times. His hope and prayer is that, as readers travel the Road with Tolkien and Lewis' characters, virtues long forgotten or ignored will be revived.

Whether or not you've read *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Chronicles of Narnia*, this easy to read book will give you much food for thought, and possibly a renewed desire to walk your own Road and to live out your own Call by embracing life-giving virtues. ➤

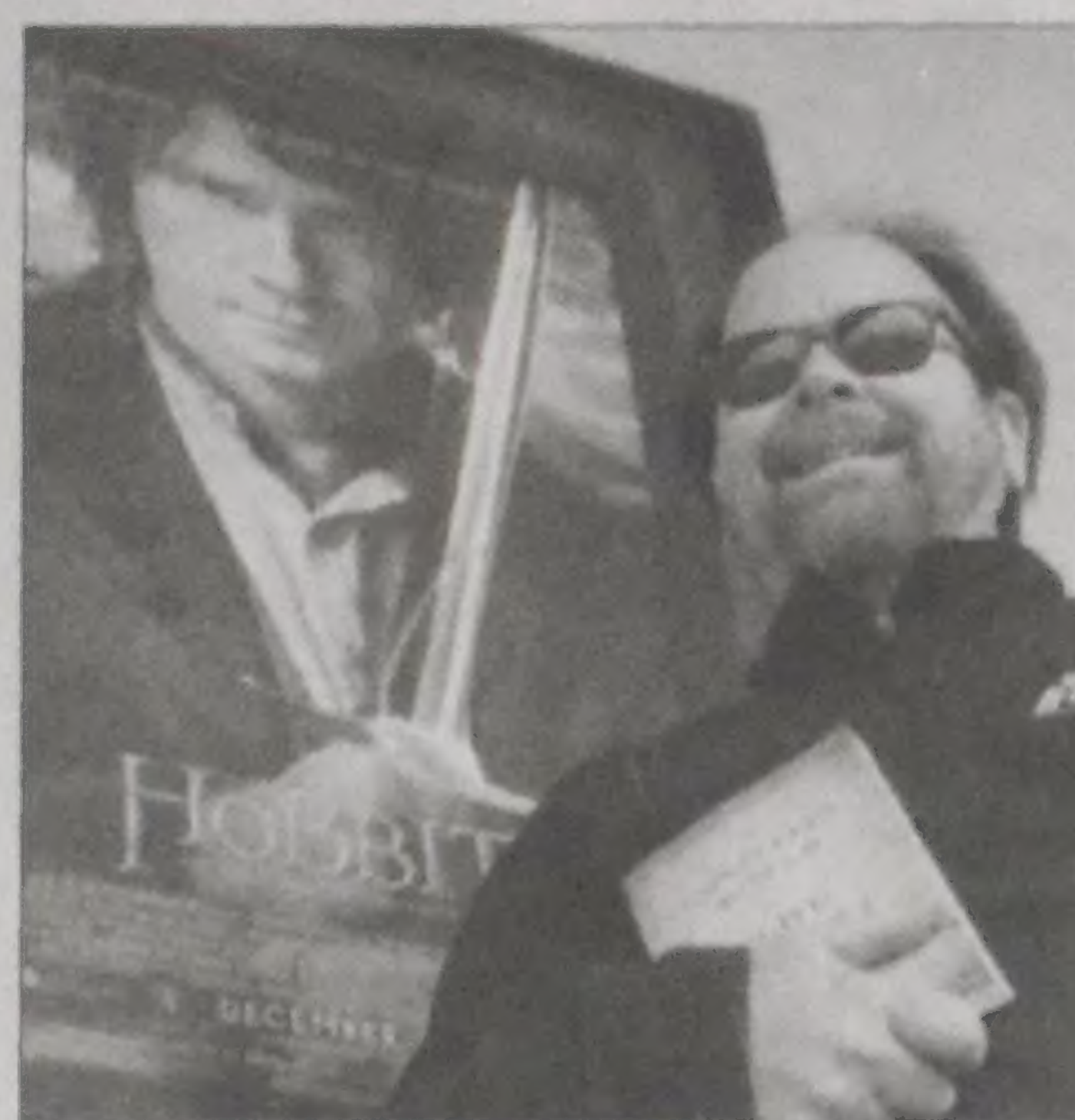


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Reviving long-forgotten virtues

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Stories. That's what we need, according to author Louis Markos. But not just any stories. Because our civilization is "adrift on the stormy seas of relativism and existentialism" (10), we need stories that will tell us the truth, and "how to live in and through and by that truth" (11). Ultimately, that involves knowing the "sacred drama" (11). It also means reclaiming classical and theological virtues that are no longer widely taught in our day and age. Markos asserts that there are only three virtues being taught in public schools today: tolerance, multiculturalism and environmentalism.



The Christian World of The Hobbit

Devin Brown

Abingdon Press, 2012, 191 p.

"essentially Christian" (15) tale of hobbits, dwarves and dragons. He draws upon the story itself, as well as a wealth of epistolary correspondence by Tolkien, in order to illuminate his thesis that though not mentioned by name by a single character, God plays a masterful part in the life of one homesick hobbit.

Without blunting the thrust of Brown's book, it is enough to say that he does highlight many valuable passages from *The Hobbit*. He is able to alert the readers to the moral value found within what would appear to be primarily adventure and action. One may find while reading the book that Brown meanders into other works, such as *The Lord of the Rings*, too often in order to make his points stand. This may be a slight failing, or it simply is a nod to the fact that one cannot discuss *The Hobbit* without drawing together all stories set in Tolkien's Middle-earth. To the fan, the reminders of those other story moments are a part of the delight of reading Brown's piece.

Having followed my thread of discovery to the Lonely Mountain and back again, it is easy to appreciate the work Devin Brown has accomplished in *The Christian World of The Hobbit*. He has created an enjoyable and readable outline of the Christian values present in Tolkien's classic tale. ➤



The Hobbit: A not-unexpected pleasure

Tom Smith

Having written off 3-D movies long ago, I was afraid that the new *Hobbit* experience would have me leaving the theatre seeing red (and blue!), but this 3-D movie was no gimmick-laced spectacle. *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* is an entertaining visual display of what those fancy glasses can do. Peter Jackson's return to Middle-Earth as director and producer in this film, the first installment of three, has not been without perils. As all quests require danger, this journey back to the sweeping vistas and living landscapes he helped to cement into his audiences' imagination has given fodder to those of critical mien. How to make new again a world already so familiar?

For starters, the Middle-Earth of *The Hobbit* does not feel entirely like that of the earlier *Lord of the Rings* films. Though the set pieces and environments are familiar, this is a world of childhood magic – complete with adorable critters, flames licking the fingers of wizards and bumbling, chatty goblins. While the movie does foreshadow the gravity of the coming battles in its sequels, for now audiences receive more singing and hijinks than many a lover of the original films may have expected. This is all, however, as Tolkien wrote the book. Bilbo Baggins, as the narrator, is alive to the wonder and magic to be experienced outside of his beloved Shire.

As for the portrayal of the reluctant adventurer and sometimes burglar, Bilbo is worthily played by Martin Freeman. Freeman captures the personality of the anxious, blustering hobbit by creating nervous mannerisms and expressions that leave little doubt as to how ready Bilbo is to be a hero. Working next to the likes of Sir Ian McKellen, Christopher Lee and other established film greats, Freeman proves that the small really can trouble the counsels of the great.

Finally, the stalwart Tolkien readers and fans of good story development may cringe at the thought of Bilbo's changes in character and relationships happening as suddenly as they do. At the centre of the movie's issue with pacing is the fact that one (smallish) novel is being stretched into three (longish) movies. Fans will love the added content of matters not treated in the original book, but nonetheless part of the story's timeline.

It will be up to each viewer to decide whether the trade-off is a treasure or a wisp of smoke. ➤

Tom Smith teaches at Holland Marsh District Christian School and, if asked, would likely claim himself to be a hobbit. Something about those fancy waistcoats. He quests with his wife, Sarah, and newest adventurer, Jakeb.



Director Jackson's challenge: to make a familiar world new again.

Features

Online dating: pros and pitfalls

Natasha Moes

It's a statistic that I've heard several times in the past few years – at least one quarter of all couples meet online. While this might seem surprising to some, it's an accurate reflection of how our culture utilizes technology in many areas of life. Based on a 2012 report published by the University of Rochester, nearly one in four couples met online between 2007 and 2009. Some researchers believe that the current percentage is even higher than one in three couples.

The popularity of online dating comes from a variety of factors – convenience, greater access to a wide variety of potential partners and removal of some of the social awkwardness that comes with in-person first introductions. Harry Reis, one of the authors of the University of Rochester study, believes that online dating is a new and much-needed twist on traditional relationship initiation because studies in behavioural economics have shown that the dating market for single people in Western society is inefficient. While he cautions against the pitfalls of online dating, such as a consumerist or “shopping” mentality, Reis believes that the Internet holds significant promise for helping people form healthy romantic relationships.

Despite its widespread popularity, online dating carries a certain stigma. Whether it is because of a cultural portrayal of online dating as only for the desperate or for middle aged men living in their mothers' basements, or just because of the novelty of the practice, it seems like the majority of people see it as a less-than-ideal way to meet someone.

I certainly felt apprehension when I started writing this article nearly six months ago. While I was single and open to dating, making a profile on a dating site was something I hadn't seriously considered. I floated the idea by a few single friends, subtly suggesting they join, too. They reacted as I anticipated: “That's great – but there's no way we're doing it.”

Fishing

Not one to back down from a challenge, I went ahead and checked out **ChristianMingle.com**. Building a profile was straightforward and simple. With a few answers about my preferences and habits, I was ready to cast my proverbial net into the sea. The next day, jumping in all the way, I added a photo of myself. By the end of the day I had 25

“likes” and 15 messages in my inbox, and a handful of guys had even added me as a “favourite”!

I quickly became frustrated with ChristianMingle (CM). The idea of being added as a “favourite” by guys I had never met and knew nothing about seemed degrading, especially when they hadn't even sent a message introducing themselves. The second aspect that caught me off guard was that it wasn't until there were messages in my inbox (which I could see but couldn't open) that I had to pay for CM's services. My curiosity got the best of me. I shelled out \$30 for a one-month membership. The site isn't useful without paying for the membership, so if you're thinking about joining, keep that in mind.

It was overwhelming to see dozens of introductions in my inbox. While flattering, this highlighted one significant feature of online dating: the high quantity of interactions. Unfortunately, what you gain in quantity, you sacrifice in quality. Many of the messages I received contained generic pickup lines that CM offers to those who lack the creativity to write their own introductions.

Unimpressed by the generic messages, I waded through my inbox and picked a few personable introductions to respond to. Careful not to give too many identifying details, I struck up a conversation with two guys and we began sending messages. They both attended churches I knew in neighbouring cities, they both had normal jobs and hobbies and they didn't seem desperate at all. I found it easy to share my thoughts and questions with them. It seemed as though the risk and vulnerability that comes with dating disappears when the potential partner is totally removed from your own social community. Control of the process inspired confidence.

Why online dating?

Early on, I told both guys that I joined CM to do first-hand research for an article. To my surprise, they were both interested in what I thought of the experience and gave me permission to write about our interactions. They, too, had experienced hesitations about online dating and saw it as a good way to meet people, but not necessarily a good way to really get to know someone. One said, “I don't interact with a lot of single girls in my day-to-day life. I guess online dating is a way to meet a wider variety of women that I have a few



things in common with but wouldn't meet any other way.” He went on to say that whenever possible, he likes to meet face-to-face after sending a few emails back and forth. Indeed, author Harry Reis writes that corresponding for weeks or months before meeting in person can create unrealistic expectations, and the way to mitigate that risk is to move to in-person interactions soon after establishing an initial connection.

Both guys confirmed my observation that members interact very little with people of their own gender on the site. Guys seem to initiate the majority of the conversations. One noted that in six months on CM, he had never been approached by a girl. While he wouldn't mind having a girl strike up a conversation, he wondered whether girls don't feel the need (or have the time) to do anything but respond since guys on CM are so quick to send messages to so many girls.

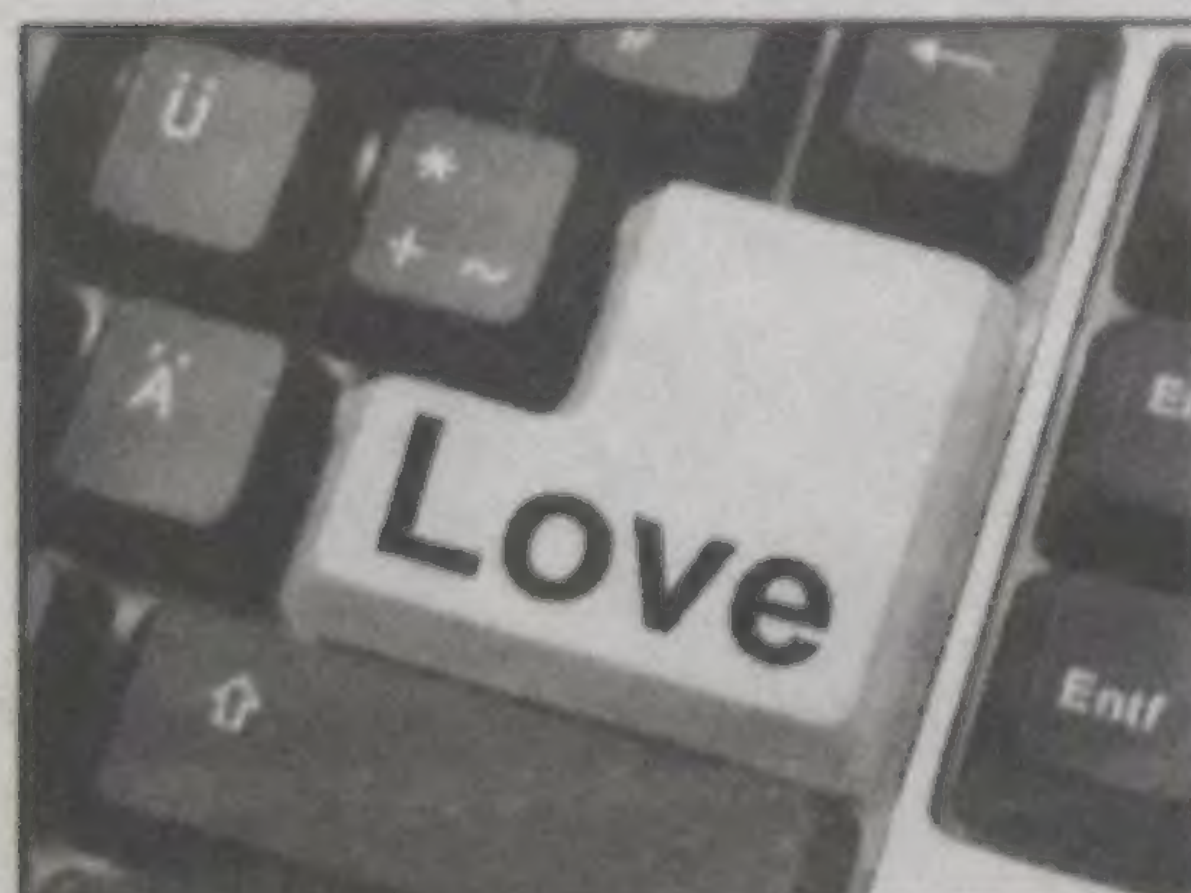
ChristianMingle certainly isn't the only niche online dating site. There's VeggieDate for vegetarians, The Atlasphere for Ayn Rand fans, or Geek2Geek for geeks. Any of these sites can lead you to a pool of people who share your views or interests; however, general dating sites like eHarmony or PlentyofFish also let you search through profiles based on niche preferences.

It's important to keep in mind that people online aren't always as honest as you'd hope. One of the guys that I met on CM said that he tries to maintain a healthy skepticism: “I can't assume that every person I meet online is telling the truth, and in online dating, you don't have mutual friends or any history to help you understand who

that person really is. It really just takes time and face-to-face interaction to build trust, and it helps to see that person in their own environment. If they say they go to church, go to church with them. Do they know the people there? Do they seem comfortable? If they are a Christian, ask what that means to them and how it affects their life. If you begin to see inconsistencies, perhaps they're not representing themselves accurately.”

Maybe you're expecting me to conclude by talking about the great dates I went on with the guys I met. I'll apologize in advance for the anticlimactic ending. As my month-long subscription came to an end, I became interested in someone I knew offline, and decided to focus my attention there instead. When I said goodbye and wished them the best, both guys online seemed to understand and weren't upset that I declined their invitations to meet. One said that our conversations had inspired him to ask a girl from his church out that weekend. All in all, it was a positive experience and has changed the way I perceive online dating. They say you can't knock it till you've tried it, and I am certainly a new advocate of meeting people online.

Natasha Moes is a recent grad living and working in Mississauga. She likes long walks on the beach (but is taken, sorry fellas) and enjoys hearing about people's best and worst dates.



Tips for online dating

DO put some thought into your username. I found that some guys' names leave a bad first impression, conveying feelings of desperation (FindingAMate67) or obsession (SuperDogLuvr81). Pick something good.

DON'T use the pick-up lines supplied by the site. Take the time to introduce yourself thoughtfully.

DO narrow your search; focus on quality interactions, not quantity.

DO anticipate and initiate a face-to-face date soon after meeting online. Aim for something casual and public, where you can talk for an hour or two. Be honest if you're not interested in a second date.

Features

Happily ever after

Melissa Deelstra

At four o'clock in the morning, I called my mom from my dorm room and exclaimed, "Mom, I really, really like this guy!" My mom responded tiredly, "If it isn't Tom, I need to go back to bed." After years of explaining to our family and friends that we were "just friends," Tom and I finally did begin dating. I am fairly certain that we were the only people who were surprised.

Tom and I met in grade 9 and fell into the same group of friends. There were eight of us. We girls occasionally had crushes on the boys, but nothing more. It wasn't until our senior year that Tom and I realized that we had become best friends. C.S. Lewis aptly captures the moment, "Friendship arises . . . when two or more of the companions discover that they have in common some insight or interest or even taste which the others do not share and which, till that moment, each believed to be his own unique treasure (or burden). The typical expression of opening Friendship would be something like this, 'What? You too? I thought I was the only one.'"

With this realization, we went off to university. We did just about everything together, all the while insisting that we were "just friends." I was pretty sure that I knew everything there was to know about Tom. Although I was not a much of a princess, he was definitely my Prince Charming. A couple months after graduation, Tom and I were married and ready to start living happily ever after.

This is where the Disney version fades out and real life continues. New jobs, no jobs, new towns, knee surgery, pregnancy, changing careers, back to school, moving to Africa and raising a child brought challenges that our dating relationship had not faced. We have learned a lot about marriage along the way.

Contemporary view of marriage

Many couples today, however, are deliberately avoiding marriage. Fewer people are choosing to get married and more and more children are being born to unmarried parents. The divorce rate today is nearly double what it was in 1960. Today, marriage is seen as an oppressive prison sentence that stifles the freedom and growth of two individuals. Timothy Keller, author, speaker and

founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, explains, "Marriage used to be a public institution for the common good, and now it is a private arrangement for the satisfaction of the individuals. Marriage used to be about *us*, but now it is about *me* . . . it is terminated. In place of marriage, many couples are choosing cohabitation with a sexual partner with the freedom to leave when the relationship becomes difficult. No chain, no commitment and no paperwork."

Reality of marriage

In his book *The Meaning of Marriage*, Keller gives a refreshing and hopeful look at marriage today. Studies have shown that marriage can increase wealth, health, satisfaction with one's life and positive outcomes for children born into that marriage. Married men earn 10 - 40 percent more money than single men with similar education and job histories. Continuously married individuals had 75 percent more wealth at retirement than those who were unmarried or divorced. Married persons are also shown to have greater physical and mental health. Keller explains these stats by suggesting that spouses often hold one another to high levels of personal responsibility. While it is commonly held that most marriages are miserable, reality is that 61 - 62 percent are *very happy* and that 60 percent of those who are not currently happy

will become happy within five years if they stay married. Married people enjoy higher levels of satisfaction with their lives than those who are unmarried, divorced or living with partners. Most importantly, children born to married two parent families have two - three times more positive outcomes than those who do not.

Biblical view of marriage

Where do we turn for a more comprehensive view of marriage? Keller invites his readers to open

their Bibles: "In the Bible you have teaching that has been tested by millions of people over centuries and in multiple cultures. . . . The Bible begins with a wedding (of Adam and Eve) and ends in the book of Revelation with a wedding (of Christ and the church). Marriage is God's idea.



Ready to start living "happily ever after."

The purpose of marriage in the Bible, according to Keller, is to help your spouse become the new creation that God is working in him or her. We are to look past our spouse's flaws and see who it is that God has created him or her to be. We can celebrate his or her new self as we lovingly encourage our spouse to put off the old self. We are unable to selflessly love our imperfect spouse, however, until we have first received the love of Christ. Keller calls this "love economics." If you are spending time in the Word and with Christ you will have lots of love to spend. If you have cut yourself off from the Word and from Christ, your account will quickly become empty.

Scripture demands that married people love their spouse, even when their feelings of love have disappeared. Keller writes that actions of love lead to feelings of love. C.S. Lewis explained this idea: "Do not waste time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbour; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him." Regardless of your present state of feeling, you are to actively love your spouse.

Living it out

With our Bibles and minds open, Tom and I have sought to know how it is that

God calls us to live out our marriage. I had assumed, when we were first married, that Tom would take care of making any and all big decisions and I would simply follow. Tom, however, seeks my input and often points out that we share the responsibility of decision-making. While created equal, we definitely have different gifts and abilities. Tom generally makes the decisions about where we move, live and work and I make decisions about what we eat, how we raise our daughter and how we stay organized. I trust Tom to lead our family, even if it means changing careers and continents, but trusting him to organize our paper work . . . that would be challenging.

I've learned a lot more about Tom since our wedding day. He is courageous, adventurous and wise. He is a leader who sacrifices himself for our family and for me every day. Just when I think I know exactly who he is, I get another glimpse of the new creation that God is actively working within him. Marriage is an incredible gift, a place where we can work out the kingdom of God here on earth!

Melissa Deelstra was recently accepted into the Distance M.Div. program at Calvin Seminary. She and Tom and their daughter Hannah live in Chatham, Ont.



Melissa's wedding dress was made by her mother.

Features

The unfaithful widow

Daphne Simpkins

"The big problem for me right now as a widow is that for the past 43 years I was focused on him. Now, I look around and around and around, but he isn't here."

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Mildred thought immediately, but even she, an unmarried woman, knew that a cliché was a wrong response when the friend in front of her who had just lost a part of her life more serious than a limb was telling her a singular and distinct truth: she was deeply disoriented. Her husband had died. He had been her focus. She didn't know where to look now.

Mildred waited, listening for that interior voice of counsel that Christians accept over time, and learn to trust and obey and call by a variety of names but not spouse. A spouse was a mystery to Mildred, as was the kind of loss that her friend was describing, but the Holy Spirit was alive and known and her dear Companion. Guidance murmured inside of Mildred Budge like a brook that bubbles unceasingly. Disciplined in listening to all of her friends, Mildred's attention split: the Brook murmured, *be still*, while her friend, the widow, continued to talk.

"I can't make sense of my life. He was here. He was always here. Then, he wasn't here. People came. Lots of them. People left. The house was full. The house is empty. I wake up and remember he is gone, and then all day long as I plan the day, what to cook, what to iron, where to go, what to buy, I keep thinking what he would like, what would he want, what does he need, and he's not here, and so I have to think about what I want, what I might like, what do I need. It isn't. . . ." She almost said *natural*, but that wasn't the word she was searching

for. She struggled to explain and shook her head, bewildered by her condition.

As her friend struggled to locate the right word, Mildred imagined what the truth could be: right, wrong – a string of other adjectives that point to features of widowhood – but she was not expecting the words her friend finally confessed.

"My life doesn't feel like home anymore. That's it – I am still here with all of this around me, but I am homeless."

"Home is where your heart is," Mildred said, ignoring her own advice not to speak in clichés.

"Exactly," her friend confirmed emphatically. "He died and took my heart and home with him."

"It's that bad," Mildred concluded softly, and there was awe in her voice for home was the most powerful draw of any lifetime. More than food, drink, physical intimacy, home stood for all of those things, and security, too. And the future – the future.

Widowhood needed a different set of vocabulary words

"It is that bad," her friend said, and Mildred sighed deeply, for she was out of wisdom and words, too. Widowhood needed a different set of vocabulary words. The ordinary language of everyday pain wasn't enough to tell the truth of the human heart that feels homeless.

"I simply don't know what to do. I wake up every day, and I don't know what to do. Where to look."

The widow looked at Mildred finally, expecting wisdom.

Mildred felt silenced, dulled by all of the usual appropriate responses to human suffering: *in all circumstances give thanks; when God closes a door, he opens a window* (which was not in the Bible but was a completely acceptable old Jewish proverb); *there are seasons for death and life*, but the only sound advice that emerged within her was not appropriate for her friend – it fit Mildred only: *it is better to go to a house of mourning than to a house of mirth*. She couldn't tell a widow that.

"Want to know something funny? I hate being hungry now. All those casseroles in my freezer, and I hate being hungry. It feels disloyal to be hungry when he isn't here to share my supper. I hate wanting anything now too; it feels as if I am forgetting him and that feels disloyal to him. I hate making any kind of plan and doing it, because it feels like I am being unfaithful. I feel unfaithful being still alive, and I was always faithful. Always," she declared emphatically. "I loved him, Mildred."

Mildred nodded, silently.

"I tried to go to a movie the other day and got as far as the ticket booth, and then I thought, I can't go in there without him. I can't go to a movie without him. We go everywhere together. Everywhere. And he left me."

"At church, I hate sitting on the same pew where we always sat because he's not going to join me now. His space stays empty. He used to give out the church bulletin and take up the collection, and then he joined me. He doesn't join me

now, but I still feel as if I am waiting for him. He's not here. He's not coming back, and I am waiting for him. He left me, Mildred. I would never leave him, Mildred – never."

Nothing to say

There was a terrible pause – a dreadful moment of silence when Mildred thought again that her friend expected her to say something, but Mildred had nothing to say. Nothing. It was an aching terrible silence. Mildred was lost inside the terrible silence with her friend, and it was so great a silence that even the tears that should have sprung to her eyes in sympathy were too deep inside of her to reach the surface. There was a terrible vacancy where her friend's husband had been, and this terrible silence marked that place.

"Most of the time I am just trying to get through the day. A lot of people have given me advice. I've tried some of it. The boldest prayer I have tried is the *make me content* prayer that I learned from Betty Little, but it only helped a little bit – like one Tylenol does against a migraine."

Mildred thought a Tylenol sounded good. She wondered if her friend would think her unfeeling, unfaithful, if she rummaged around in her purse for her portable pill bottle. She did feel as if she needed something for the pain that her friend was enduring and which she was now sharing. Mildred sighed deeply – groaned.

"But then I decided I wouldn't ask God for anything. Nothing. Not even contentment, because all of it – anything you could want – all of it, felt . . . unfaithful to my husband to ask. That's the only word that comes close to describing living like this without him. I feel like an unfaithful widow because I am still here."

Mildred's hand reached for her purse. She unzipped it. Plunged her right hand into it. Her fingers searched for the Tylenol. Her friend might not take one, but she really needed something for the pain of this loss. Just sitting beside the pain of widowhood was hard.

Blessed be the name of the Lord

But before Mildred could locate the bottle, her friend said, "The only thing that has helped – absolutely the only thing – is the *God is sovereign* prayer. He gives and he takes. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

"Blessed be the name of the Lord," Mildred repeated automatically. Her pain receded slightly.

"That is the only thing that helps."

Mildred's hand let go of the pill bottle. She withdrew her hand from the purse.

"And so I pray that now pretty much all day long. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

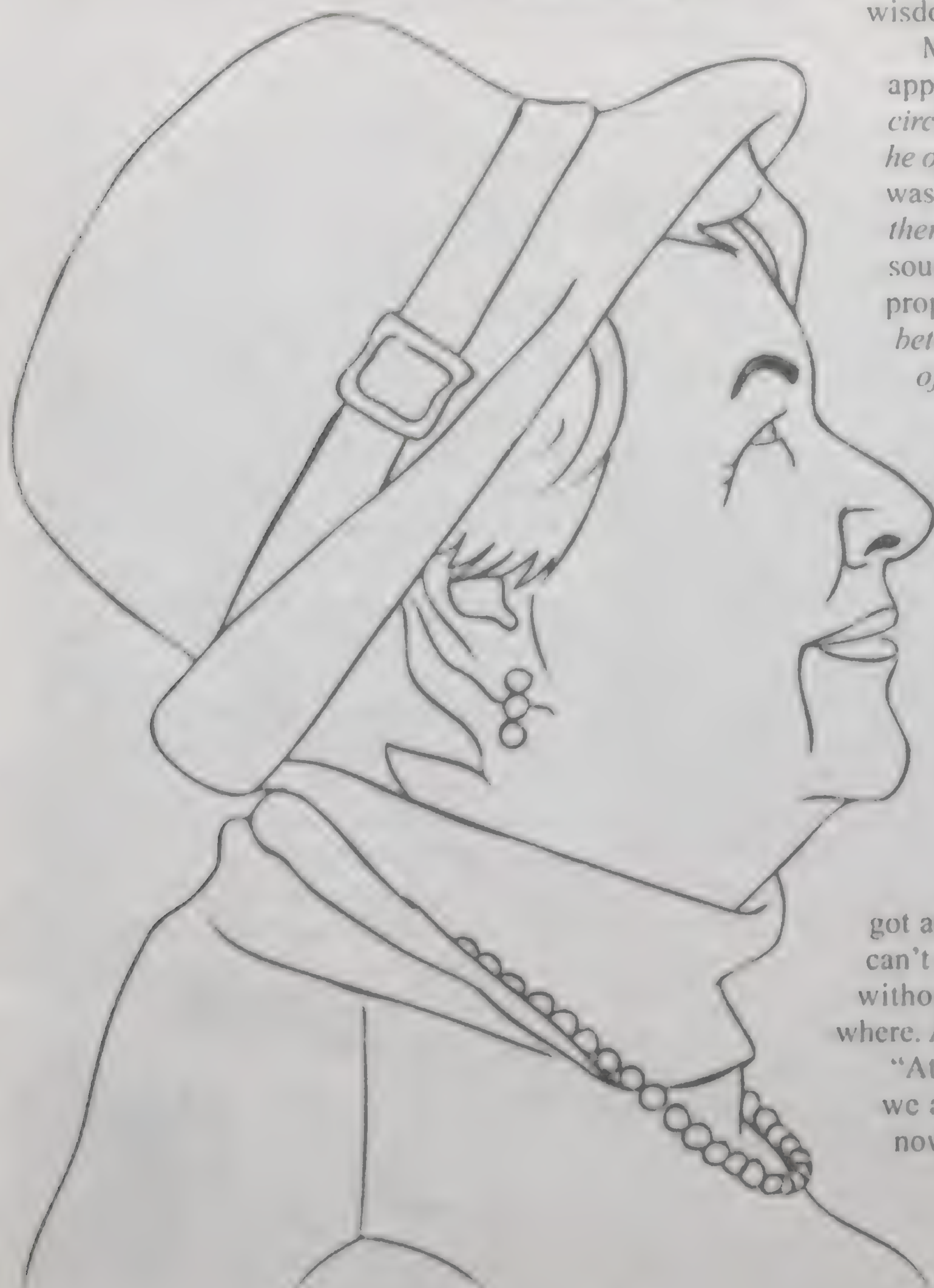
She inhaled, then said, "Do you want something to drink? We could have something to drink. I sure have been talking a lot, and I am thirsty. It was good of you to come, Millie. And thanks for not giving me any advice. There is no advice. There is only Blessed be the name of the Lord."

And as she said the words, the fresh widow finally, her heart broken, smiled.

Daphne Simpkins currently writes *The Adventures of Mildred Budge*, a series of books about church ladies of the South. Titles include *Cloverdale*, *Miss Budge in Love*, and, coming in the spring of 2013, *Embankment*. Find out more at DaphneSimpkinsAProdigy.net.



The inimitable Mildred Budge.



Columns

Intangible Things

Heidi Vander Slikke



Travelling in tandem



Blustery winds rocked the pick-up truck as I drove along Highway 86 toward Kitchener one morning. Snow as grainy as beach sand barely covered the adjacent fields and skittered across the pavement. A kilometre ahead of me brake lights flashed red and a whole line of cars slowed down and veered slightly to the left. The reason for the rural traffic jam became clear as I approached.

Two young Mennonite boys, somewhere around ten years-old I would imagine, rode their bikes along the shoulder of the road. How they managed to keep their black hats on in that wind remains a mystery. Between them they balanced an aluminum extension ladder, at least 15 feet long. They gripped their handlebars with their left hands and the ladder dangled precariously on their right side as they attempted to transport it down the road together.

It wasn't going so well. I suspect the road was bumpier, the wind stronger and the ladder far more awkward than they had anticipated when they hatched their brilliant plan to do this task "the easy way." With every icy blast of wind the ladder swayed wildly, jostling the boys and buffeting them ever closer toward the pavement. Pedalling was excruciatingly difficult. Their feet constantly slipped off the pedals on one side or the other, as they halted and rebalanced themselves and their load. Forward progress was slow. They were quite a distance from the nearest farm, and I had no idea if that was their destination, or how far they had yet to travel.

I considered stopping to help. But what would they think of a complete stranger trying to nab them, their bicycles and their precious cargo? And what might their parents say about accepting a ride from someone they didn't know? I watched them in the rear view mirror as long as I could, then prayed that they wouldn't get knocked over by a passing transport truck or speeding car.

It's possible they eventually dropped their bikes on the roadside and carried the ladder to its intended destination, then returned for their bikes afterward. Or maybe they persevered and somehow managed to get where they were going – bikes, bodies and ladder intact. At any rate they must have succeeded somehow. I base this assumption on the fact that there was no story on the evening news of a strange but tragic accident. And no self-respecting farm dad (Mennonite or otherwise) would tolerate a perfectly

good extension ladder abandoned on the side of the highway, so they must have accomplished their goal in the end.

I had to admire their determination and their ingenuity, even if it was slightly foolish. No one could have talked them out of their brilliant scheme, I'm sure. Some things in life must be experienced to be fully appreciated. And once you're into a journey like that, there's no turning back.



John and Maria VanderSlikke, then and now.

Life's adventures

I replayed the scene in my mind and searched for a bigger life lesson attached to it. The whole episode applies nicely to marriage, doesn't it? With Valentine's Day just ahead, I naturally think of my in-laws. John and Maria VanderSlikke were married in Holland on February 14, 1951. Mom wasn't quite 20 years old and Dad had just turned 21. They spoke hardly any English and didn't have much money, but they had a grand idea.

They dreamed of immigrating to Canada, making a new life for themselves and starting a family of their own. Little did they know of the adventures that lay ahead. Dad came to Canada by himself very soon after the wedding. He ventured to Saskatchewan, where his Uncle John lived. Mom followed a short time later. Life on the Canadian prairie proved to be more rugged and isolated than they had bargained for. Pregnancy brought challenges of its own and they returned to Holland so that Nellie could be born there. Eventually the young family returned to Canada, this time settling in Ontario. And the rest, as they say, is history.

They've been travelling through life in tandem now for 62 years. At this point they make it look pretty easy. But they can tell you there were some big potholes, fierce winds and heavy loads along the way. Like I said, some things have to be experienced to be fully appreciated.

So, Mom and Dad, if you're reading this in the latest *Christian Courier* – Happy Anniversary! On behalf of the whole family, thank you for persevering and showing us all how it's done. By your example, we know that the Lord is the One who watches over you, picks you up when you fall and shares the load when it's too bulky for human shoulders. May God continue to bless you both as you travel along life's road together.

Heidi Vander Slikke (hmvanderslikke@hotmail.com) lives in Harriston, Ont.

ARTFUL EYE



Basket of Wild Strawberries, 1761.

10th Anniversary

Ten years ago, after the first night we spent together,
we went to pick strawberries
knee-deep in furrows of scalloped leaves,
white flowers winking like stars.
It's still early morning
but we're drunk on the winy air
and the headiness of our desire.
As we kissed more than we picked,
our mouths brushed like petals
rubbing in the wind,
our crimson fingers strayed
beyond the boundaries of clothing.
Stitch us in that tapestry forever,
baskets full of berries, and always in love . . .
But we had to go home,
turn the fresh fruit into preserves:
hull and cull the berries, crush them
with lemon, boil until thick
and sweet with yearning and sun.
Sealed in wax, each jar's stained glass,
full of the light.
And when we spread this redness
on morning toast, sparks
rekindle and glow.

And now it's ten years later.
Strawberry picking's an annual
task I do alone, or with a friend.
I boil the jam down to the clatter
of children underfoot.
And our eyes meet over curly heads
and our hands brush like green leaves in the wind . . .
And the jam shines in its cathedral of wax,
the sweetness of early June
poured in glass jars.
On January mornings,
when love & light are memories,
these red suns
light our cellar shelf.

~ Barbara Crooker

Barbara Crooker is a poet living in Pennsylvania, Pa. Her new book, *Gold*, will be available later this year from Cascade Books, a Division of Wipf & Stock, in their *Poetima Poetry Series*. 10th Anniversary first appeared in *West Branch*, 1988, and is reprinted here with permission. Barbara notes that she and her husband will be celebrating their 38th wedding anniversary this year!



Columns

Roots and Wings

Emily Cramer



Things I have learned from my husband OR Hollywood's multi-billion dollar lie industry

I've never actually seen it happening, but somehow, before the beginning of January, all the stores are mysteriously divested of their Christmas gear and re-garlanded with the gaudy trappings of Valentine's Day. It never fails to surprise me when, without warning, all the green-and-red becomes pink-and-red. No store wants to miss a second of marketability, I guess. And it did its work on me; on the way to a baby play group this morning, I found myself thinking of my husband and his notorious lack of romance as the middle of February draws near. Actually, my husband is not much of a romantic at any time of the year, at least not in the sense I envisioned it, growing up as a girlie-girl in a romanticized culture.

Maybe it all began with Disney. I can't think of a single Disney movie that doesn't involve some kind of swept-off-her-feet female character. Even though recent female heroines are less pale and baby-voiced than, say, Snow White, and even though some show a little *chutz-pah* and do a bit of their own rescuing, the ultimate goal is to be loved and claimed by a dashing prince-type. Once today's girl has grown beyond Disney, she finds herself bombarded by fashion icons, advertising, romantic movies, music—a raft of sources steering her toward the desire and attention of men. There is something within women that responds to

this story; a Disney film that ended with the heroine wishing the prince well and leaving him to start her own Fortune 500 company would hardly be a smash hit.

I don't think the desire for romance is the problem. But maybe there is something wrong with the way we expect it to manifest. This also leads me to think of my husband who continuously fails to meet my idealized standards for love and continuously re-educates me about what love actually is, if I choose to see it that way.

After the credits roll

One of the first real characteristics of love I've encountered through my husband is fidelity. Hollywood takes us to the doorstep of love, to the engagement and occasionally to the wedding itself, but long-term couples know all that is the easy stuff. Real love gets its mettle tested after the credits roll. To find your husband still there when you are being unreasonable, doggedly returning not just to the house but to the pursuit of your heart even when

you are being your worst self, *that* is love. To listen to the same, recurring argument for years and still try to hear it anew and even to change again, *that* is love. Fidelity goes well beyond sexual faithfulness; it is a rootedness, a solidity of character, a bone-deep determination to *stay* and to *try*.

I have also learned from James that love is optimistic. Real love doesn't just stick it out, it begins again each morning, believes that change is imminent, remembers the best days and sees them as the real identity of the relationship, not an impossible, long-ago dream. Love looks at what it has as the best that could be; it doesn't wistfully compare its reality to an imagined alternative. Love smiles on the beloved for no reason other than the belief that good things are afoot, even without evidence that it is so.

Love compensates. Where one is weak, it bubbles up to fill the lack, redoubles its efforts in that fragile spot. I am not good at apologizing first; anger tends to have its way with me, and I struggle to let go and forgive. It is here, where I fail again and again, that my husband steps up to close the distance between us. His willingness to humble himself first has saved us from many extended cold wars. That is not a quality I was looking for in a spouse, not something that even registered as important. But it turns out to be the most significant contribution to peace in my daily life.

All of this is not to say that my husband is a perfect man or that our marriage is smooth and harmonious. But here is another quality of love that I've learned through James: love tries really, really hard, and this makes the failures much more bearable. Knowing he will feel badly, apologize and care enough to try harder next time makes it so much easier to forgive. His efforts to grow tell me I am loved in a way no box of chocolate or piece of jewelry ever could.

Paul already explained this in 1 Corinthians 13. I could have known. But God brought me a living, breathing man to act it out, perhaps so the power of Hollywood would have a little competition and so his eternal love could meet me here, in the flesh, romantic that I am. >

Emily Cramer lives in Barrie, Ont. with her husband and daughter and teaches in the Liberal Arts department at Georgian College. She is following up on her New Year's resolution by reading the uplifting, Jesus, Man of Joy, by Sherwood Eliot Wirt.



In a heavily romanticized culture, today's girl idealizes fairy-tale endings.



Can a fork (just \$99) make you thin?

Technically Speaking

Derek Schuurman



Smart forks, empty wallets: The Consumer Electronics Show

The city of Las Vegas hosts the annual Consumer Electronics Show (CES) each year, an appropriate venue for the annual trade show featuring a spectacle of dazzling new electronic gadgets. A wide variety of high-tech devices are unveiled at the beginning of each new year at CES. This year was no exception, featuring devices ranging from smart TVs to smart refrigerators, from smart phones to smart cutlery.

On display were gadgets such as the HAPIfork, the latest in high-tech cutlery, which tracks how many bites you take and links to a website that tracks your eating. If you eat too fast, the fork vibrates and warns you to slow down. The Samsung T9000 internet fridge includes a touch screen and "apps" that enable you to share photos and recipes with family and friends. There was also the Panasonic SR-SX2 rice cooker, which can be controlled by your smartphone. And then there's the iPotty—a training toilet for children with a built-in iPad holder.

And of course, there were a parade of new TVs—some reaching over 100 inches (2.5 metres) in size. Others bragged improved picture quality, including new "Ultra HD" flatscreens which sport four times higher resolution than regular HD TVs. Suddenly, the 32-inch flatscreen TV that sits in our basement feels outdated and lackluster in comparison. CES also debuted a variety of new Windows 8 tablets and laptops. There was also the requisite collection of new smartphones, touted by many as the "remote for your life."

In the late 1960s an executive at Intel named Gordon Moore predicted that the number of transistors on computer chips would double roughly every 18 months. As it turns out, his prediction, which has come to be known as "Moore's Law," has

continued to the present day. The rapid advances in the complexity of computer chips have driven decades of computer improvements, enabling smaller and faster devices each year. Although the development of new technology is part of the unfolding of the possibilities in creation, I suspect a stroll down the aisles at CES would also inspire feelings of discontent. As someone who works with technology, I need to remind myself that the measure of a man's life is not the size of his television.

The measure of a man's life is not the size of his television.

But among the marketing hype at CES, there were also some genuine innovations. There were advances in 3D printing, flexible glass screens, autonomous self-driving cars and an aid for the hearing-impaired. Most of the devices at CES are not revolutionary but

simply incremental improvements to existing devices. Such improvements, combined with slick marketing campaigns, encourage us to constantly upgrade, discarding our current devices for the latest features and fads. Although I did not attend CES, I imagine it would not have taken long for me to start coveting the shiny new gadgets on display.

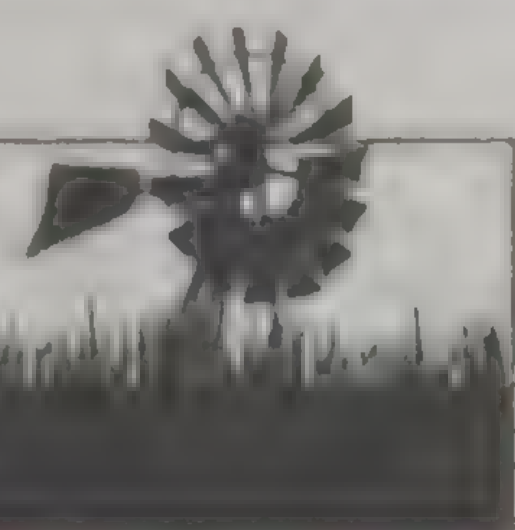
A responsible approach to our personal electronics should include considerations of stewardship and sustainability. Perhaps what we need is not only a fork that vibrates when we eat too much, but a wallet that vibrates when we needlessly purchase new consumer electronic devices. However, I don't think the industry will unveil such a product anytime soon, despite the continuing leaps in technology. >

Derek Schuurman has recently finished writing a book on faith and computer technology titled Shaping a Digital World. It will be published by InterVarsity Press and released in June 2013.

Columns

Country Living

Meindert van der Galien



When a big snow storm blows in, or the snow is hard after a thaw and a freeze-up, people suddenly want to help the deer by feeding them hay and corn. From the warmth of

our homes and the daily routine of feeding domestic stock and pets, it is often assumed that we should help deer survive the rigors of winter.

Some folks love watching birds at their feeders; why not Bambi in the back yard too? A retired couple who live at a cross road on the next concession from us have been feeding deer on their back lawn for years, but they've finally stopped the practice. I've seen as many as 10 deer there. The couple lives on the agricultural side of the highway: deer came from the miles of bush on the other side. It was a hazard to traffic as they moved to and from the feeding site.

Concentrating deer around feeders near homes can cause a number of problems. The first thing to consider is why you want to feed deer. If it's to make yourself feel good or to see more deer from the kitchen window, please reconsider. These reasons are for your benefit,

Pampering winter deer is unwise

not necessarily the deer's.

Be careful: the deer you pamper over the winter will probably be back in the summer to munch at your garden and pumpkin patch. They need some "tough love" instead.

Just as people have learned that sometimes well-meant help facilitates unhealthy behaviour, so winter-feeding of deer is unhealthy – or even deadly – for deer, say wildlife specialists. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) generally discourages feeding deer except in special circumstances, and then it must be done properly if the efforts are to actually be of overall benefit to the deer.

Starve on a full stomach

The DNR warns that feeding deer hay or corn can kill them, because they cannot always digest it. Deer digestion involves protozoa and bacteria that help break down food. Different micro-organisms help digest different types of vegetations. If a deer has been feeding on aspen or willows, it has built only up the micro-organisms that digest this kind of vegetation. If this same deer suddenly fills its stomach with corn or hay, it may not have enough of the corn and hay-digesting micro-organisms in its stom-



Consider why you want to feed winter deer: their benefit, or yours?

ach to digest the food. A deer can starve to death with a full stomach.

In addition, deer can become fixated on a food source. Deer will stay near a food source, even an inadequate one, rather than seek more sufficient food in other areas. Deer will concentrate around a feeder rather than scattering through the available winter range.

Another problem is that deer won't divvy up feed equally. Deer need three and a half pounds of good browse daily. If you aren't feeding this much for each one, some will be undernourished. Even if you provide this much food per day on average, some deer will eat five pounds and leave other deer with too little. So some deer will starve.

Furthermore, artificial feeding can spread disease. When deer are abnormally close to one another, contagious diseases or parasites are more easily spread. Wildlife pathologists now suspect that artificially-fed deer in high populations may develop disorders that lead to peculiar habits, such as eating hair from themselves and other deer.

Many deer visiting feed stations are carrying fawns. Deer have evolved to fear man. This has helped them survive. Artificial feeding forces them to ignore the presence of people. In some cases, this could be their downfall.

Specialists have noted that even if you could avoid every problem I just listed, next year, the perfectly fed and healthy animals' offspring would come with their mothers. Each subsequent year, you would need to provide more feed for the new generations. In truth, you may hurt more deer than you help if you feed them.

Meindert van der Galien is presently reading the thick immigrant book To All Our Children – The Story Of The Postwar Dutch Immigration To Canada. He had read some of the stories before, but is now reading it cover to cover.

Stewardship by the numbers

Many Christians feel called to serve God through environmental stewardship, yet are overwhelmed by the enormity of the issues facing us today. This is the third in a four-part series that offers practical, concrete steps towards improving our care of creation.



Part III: Renewable energy

Jordan Hoogendam

For those of you who have implemented energy efficiency measures and are looking for the next step towards sustainability, I think a natural consideration is onsite energy generation. Because of the environmental benefit, simplicity of installation and ease of operation, I highly recommend solar photovoltaic energy. Let me address a few common questions and then outline our family's experience.

Do solar panels produce as much energy as they take to manufacture? The short answer: they do, many times over. In fact, recent figures cited by *Home Power Magazine* indicate that this payback is lower than two years. Other sources indicate that total system energy payback is under three and a half years. Such numbers are pretty astounding, considering most solar modules are warranted for 25 yrs, and expected to last 30 or more years.

Do solar panels work? How efficient are they? Solar photovoltaic technology

is not new; in fact, it was first "discovered" and harnessed in Bell Laboratories back in the 1950s. Since that time the technology has become both more efficient and cost effective. I have had the opportunity to review modules in the field that have been reliably operating for more than 20 years.

Is solar cost-effective as an energy source? In my view, the most significant barrier to wide-scale adoption of solar is the capital cost. Fortunately, that cost has seen a significant drop in the last few years. In Ontario and across the United States, installed system costs are down by 50 percent as a result of a variety of market forces, including incentive programs (in Ontario, the microFIT/FIT program), the commodification of the technology and the resultant mass production of the materials.

What is the payback on solar energy? The easiest way to compare energy sources is to consider the life-cycle cost to generate a unit of energy. With solar, that cost is between 20 and 30 cents per kWh (kilowatt hour), depending on the scale of the system. When you compare



Installing a 3 kW solar panel system on the Hoogendam house

this to conventional "grid" electricity at 10 to 15 cents per kWh, you see the major barrier. That said, the US Energy Information Administration has issued a report that indicates that by 2017, large-scale solar will be at approximately \$0.153 cents/kWh. Because of this reduction in cost, along with the fact that the cost of grid electricity continues to climb, it is conceivable that within this decade solar

energy will be at parity with grid electricity. These are exciting times!

Our house

So those are the facts, but what does it take to put in a system? We were able to install a system on our house last year. We started on November 1, 2011, with the

See Renewable Energy, p. 19

News

Our fractured fellowship ..continued from page 2



"No one is a perfect pastor."

The hurt

The statistics do not reveal the gut-wrenching hurt that is caused when relations between congregations and their ministers break down. Morale takes a nose-dive, and the energy is zapped from the congregation as additional meetings pile up and ministry takes a back seat. Council members are flooded with letters laced with grief, anger and even threats. Marriages are tested as spouses return from recurring late night meetings. Says one leader: "A few of our elders almost lost their businesses while managing the conflict." A dark cloud hangs over Sunday mornings, and the lack-luster singing reveals the strain.

"It's been so hurtful," reported one female member of a congregation that released their pastor under Article 17. "I'm crying inside because some of the outreach things we worked so hard on are dying. It's not the way God wanted us to live together." A member of the local community of another church asked, "Why are you letting your pastor go? Will you still help with our neighbourhood program?" Church witness suffers.

Another woman spoke of the shock and anger in some members who were not part of the process. Then she was elected to the council and "it became quite clear that it is in the best interest of all not to make details of the conflict public." Personnel matters require confidentiality to mitigate gossip and protect reputations.

Ministers tell stories of members accusing them right after the service with their complaints and at times crude remarks. Anecdotes are easy to find of pastors being bullied, harassed and stymied by councils or individuals who cannot give them the benefit of the doubt. A retired colleague shockingly told one young pastor: "*De dominee is het piespaaltje van de gemeente*" meaning "the minister is the fire hydrant ['pisspost'] of the congregation." They feel over-worked and under-appreciated, and still they have to go up to the pulpit and maintain grace and composure while teaching about the good news of God's redeeming work in Jesus. Ordained ministry can be a very lonely experience.

One CRC congregation is working

through the aftermath of a messy end to their pastor's tenure. A transition team has been doing congregational surveys, hosting meetings and sending reports to the membership. One section of a report is entitled "Bullying," and it claims the topic was often named in congregational feedback. "Bullying rears its ugly head when insults wound another, when intimidation occurs or someone tears another down, and when hurtful words are

spoken . . . Bullying negates the Biblical model to love one another and build one another up, to think of others better and higher than yourself and to sacrificially serve them as Jesus did." Fear – of change or of no change – casts out love.



"I am a work in progress."

The healing

The story doesn't always end with hurt. Some congregations bring as many resources to bear as they can find, including denominational help from the Pastor-Church Relations Office, Shalem Mental Health Network, external leadership reviews and classis visitors. Sometimes this extends the process and pain, but often it clarifies things and moves them forward. Severance packages can be offered and both sides part ways with less rancor than would otherwise happen. But money is not a solution to these struggles.

One pastor told me how he resigned due to exhausting irresolvable conflict about leadership expectations. After classis sealed his parting with the congregation, a few people felt remorse, and formal reconciliation circles were engaged with specific members that had caused hurt. Reconciliation does not require that employment continue; sometimes it's easier after the dust has settled on the practical issues.

Wounded pastors have many options in terms of restoring their sense of vocation, confidence and soulfulness. Retreat Centres are available for those with the time and funds to rehabilitate: CRC pastors can get assessments at Pine Rest in

Grand Rapids or attend retreats at places like Quiet Waters and Pastors on Point, both in Colorado. There are also "Epic Fail Pastors Conferences" at different locations in the U.S. On a more preventative note, Dr. Syd Hielema says many pastors today are intentionally seeking a coach or mentor to "sturdify" them for the challenges they face.

Wounded congregations can become pastor-shy and become extremely cautious after a difficult experience with a pastor. They limp along, seeking time to heal and re-evaluate their vision and mission before trying again. This is a good idea – it's better than catching another pastor on the rebound, but if done systemically, it slows the circulation of pastors through congregations.

"We need to covenant together to do things differently," explained Rev. Martin Contant, Home Missions leader for Western Canada. "Many churches fuss around with technical change (tweaking this, slightly changing that) when they need to engage in adaptive change (where we know we need to change but don't have all the answers yet)." In other words, technical change means writing up a congregational covenant of restorative practice and passing it through council. Adaptive change means shifting congregational culture so that members naturally

live out the values of restorative practice in their regular church life.



"God still has better things ahead."

The hope

Pastor Y (mentioned at the beginning of this article) is doing some healthy post-mortem reflection on his life and God's church.

"Since the Article 17 process, God has affirmed in a variety of ways that he has further ministry in store for me. No one is going to be a perfect pastor. I look at the characters of the Bible, like Joseph. He was pretty arrogant, and I don't think God wanted to use him with the attitude he had growing up. He needed to go through the experience in the pit, in slavery and in pris-

on, so God could use him in great ways. I am a work in progress, and I'm confident that God still has better things ahead."

Life beyond the pit comes by grace and involves earnest soul searching. Institutionally speaking, denominational leaders need to sound the alarm and impress ministers and congregational leaders with the urgency of the issues, although ironically denominational leadership itself has been in the throes of conflict and transition. The disease is perniciously systemic: the stories described here are intensely local in their experience, but the painful reality is a widespread pandemic of leadership breakdown. The CRC church in North America is mixed up in the brokenness of the world, and we urgently need to align ourselves and our communities with God's redemptive power in Jesus Christ's death and resurrection.

We may be inclined to mine the wisdom of business management, offer therapeutic advice or borrow ideas from other traditions we see flourishing. To truly thrive, however, we need to be energized by our own confessional, missional, kingdom of God tradition. How does our Reformed institution-building DNA translate to a networked consumer age? We are being invited in this crisis to bring our Biblical imagination to bear on a new cultural landscape. As we experiment, where do we resist, where do we embrace and where do we transform our context? Regardless, we must trust that our identity and mission as the body of Christ will strengthen us for the adaptive challenges of the day.

Practically speaking, we can put additional supports in place to help minimize the damage. Former Canadian Ministries Director Rev. Bruce Adema says that the CRC may need a more robust system for handling church-pastor conflicts. "We might benefit by having a bishop-like figure, someone with an accountable form of authority to enter and defuse these situations. They could meet with the council and pastor and gently remove the pastor if necessary. Presbyterians have it in

the power of their classis (presbytery) to do so; in the Salvation Army, they have a higher ranking officer with that role. We only have two specialists in these matters. We need one for every classis." Former CRC campus ministers Neil and Virginia Lettinga, for example, have worked with congregations in B.C. that are between pastors.

Most importantly, on the level of congregational culture, we need to learn how to manage conflict in a healthy way. The old CRC consensus on worship and min-

Continued on p.17

Classifieds

Anniversaries



We are happy to announce the
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JOHN AND RIA JAGER
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Congratulations from your children,
grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

60th Anniversary

Zuidwolde, Drenthe Holland – Hamilton, Ont. Canada
Feb. 27, 1953 Feb. 27, 2013

"As for me and my house we will serve the Lord"
Joshua 24:15b



With grateful hearts to God for His many blessings
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and 16 great-grandchildren of

JOHN AND TINIE BENJAMINS

congratulate them on their 60th wedding anniversary.
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Obituaries

Amsterdam, Netherlands Ottawa, Ontario
May 22, 1938 January 8, 2013

"Safe in the arms of Jesus"

On January 8, 2013, the Lord called home

Cornelis Hogeveen
in his 75th year.

Beloved husband of Jetty Hogeveen (nee Jansen)
for 53 years.

Loving father and Opa to:

Sheila & David Balmer – Ottawa, Ont.
Colwyn

Richard & Monique Hogeveen – Toronto, Ont.
Sophie, Claire, Erin

Joanne Hogeveen – Ottawa, Ont.
Shelley Hogeveen – Toronto, Ont.

He will be dearly missed by his brothers and
sisters Nan Budding, Bert and Gerda Hogeveen,
Jane and John Vandesande, Helen Hogeveen,
John and Lettie Hogeveen, Rita and Bert Hoolwerf,
Henny and John Hoogeveen, Kemp and Nellie
Jansen, Sid and Susan Jansen, as well as many
nieces, nephews and friends.

Predeceased by brother Henk Hogeveen and
brother-in-law Hubert Budding.

*But for you who revere my name, the sun of
righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.
And you will go out and leap like calves released
from the stall. Malachi 4:2*

Correspondence: J. Hogeveen
68 Sullivan Ave.
Ottawa ON K2G 1V2

Nov. 13, 1947 Dec. 31, 2012

Peter Van Harmelen

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."
Ps. 23:1

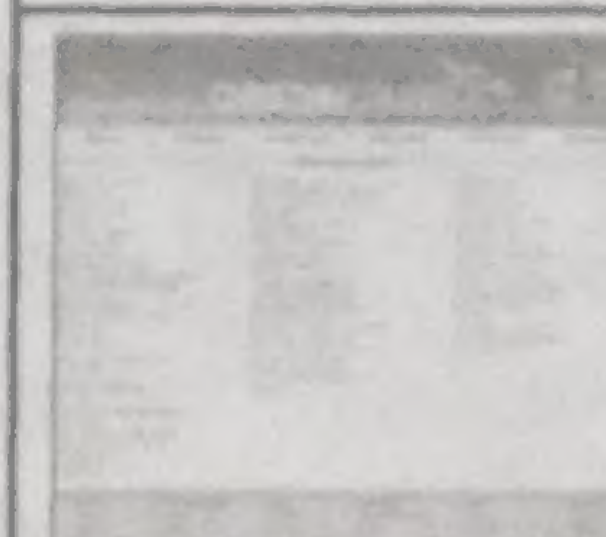
After a short struggle with cancer, the Lord took
to himself our beloved son, brother and uncle.
Peter died very peacefully knowing that he
would be with the Lord.

Beloved son of Joanna Van Harmelen and the
late Jack Van Harmelen.

Much loved brother and uncle of
Rita and Joe Oosterhof – Grand Valley, Ont.
James Oosterhof
David and Susan Oosterhof (Savanna)
Teresa and Todd Adamson
Joanne and Ian Hughes (Olivia, Liam)
Jim and Serena Van Harmelen – Denver Col.
Timothy Van Harmelen

Funeral service was held on Jan. 5, 2013 in
the Brampton CrossPoint Christian Reformed
Church with Pastor Richard Grift officiating.

Correspondence address: Rita & Joe Oosterhof
402097 County Rd 15
Grand Valley ON L9W 0Z2



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church office at

office@cornerstonecrc.ca
or 1-604-792-2517.

You can view all our job postings
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Calvin CRC, Ottawa, Ont., is seeking a

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Canada's capital.

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values.

Contact Larry Vandergrift,
Chair of the Search Committee,
at larryvandergrift@rogers.com
to request copies of the church profile and
job description.

Immanuel CRC is a progressive and dynamic
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For a detailed job description go to
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detailing their interests in the Ministry Director pos-
ition, along with salary expectations to
careers@immanuelcrc.ca.

Please note that only qualified applicants will be
contacted.

Bethel CRC, Dunnville, Ont.,
is searching for a

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This is a part time position (up to 10 hours per
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and Saviour and give expression of a Reformed/
biblical worldview utilizing a broad range of musi-
cal skills in a "blended worship" setting.

A full job description is available from the church
at bethel@dunnvillecrc.ca

Submit your cover letter with resume of ap-
plicable skills to Pastor Frank Engelage at
mc4bethel@dunnvillecrc.ca

Only applicants selected for interview will be
contacted

Fractured fellowship ...continued from p.16

istry has given way to a new internal pluralism and we can
anticipate encountering differences on every aspect of church
life. Yet a diverse unity can replace the old uniformity – if we
explicitly negotiate our expectations; if we make prayer, lis-
tening and trusting our first reflex rather than protest, power-
brokering and blame; and if we take the posture of each
other's teachable student. This may be the greatest test of our
Christian practise: if in spite of the pain we forgive each other
in love and move forward in ministry.

"The Scriptural call keeps on telling us, 'Do not fear,'" encourages Bill VanGroningen, chaplain at Trinity Christian College in Chicago. "And to instead sow in tears now so that we may reap with joy later. That takes courage of conviction. A living in faith and hope."



Peter Schuurman is on the editorial
board of CC and is currently teaching
Leadership in Ministry 352 at Redeemer
University College in the Youth Ministry
Certification program.

HOLLAND & RHINE/MOSELLE CRUISE TOUR

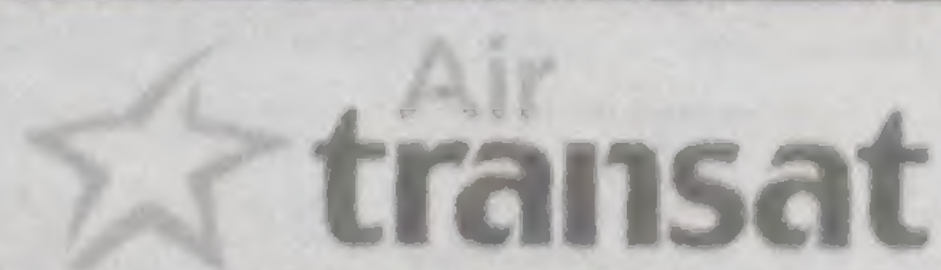
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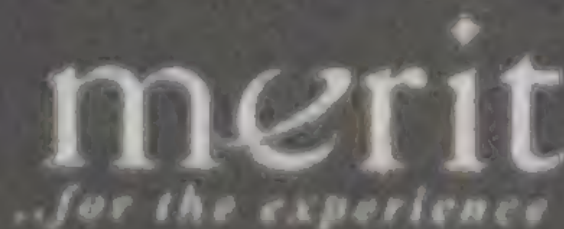
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Houston Christian School, Houston, BC
With the resignation of Principal John Siebenga
in July 2013, the board invites
inquiries or applications for a

Principal / Teacher

Houston Christian school was instituted 1962
and is K-12 with approx 100 students. Houston
is a small forestry based community of about
3200 residents. Our students come mainly from
Baptist, Canadian Reformed, Christian Re-
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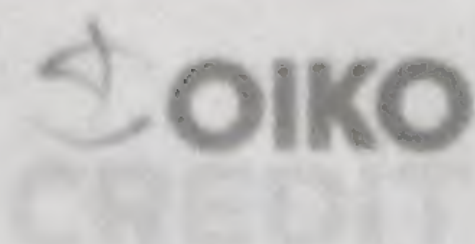
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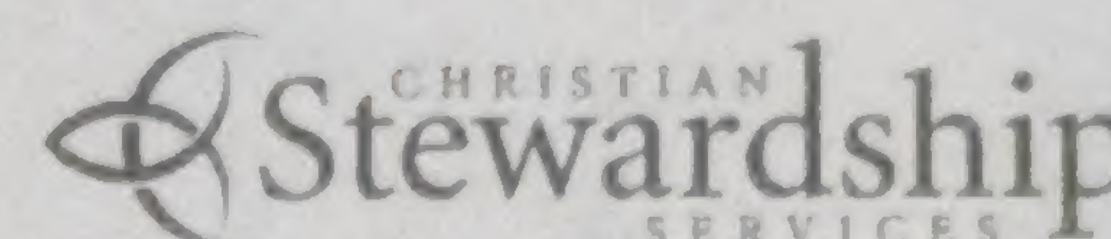
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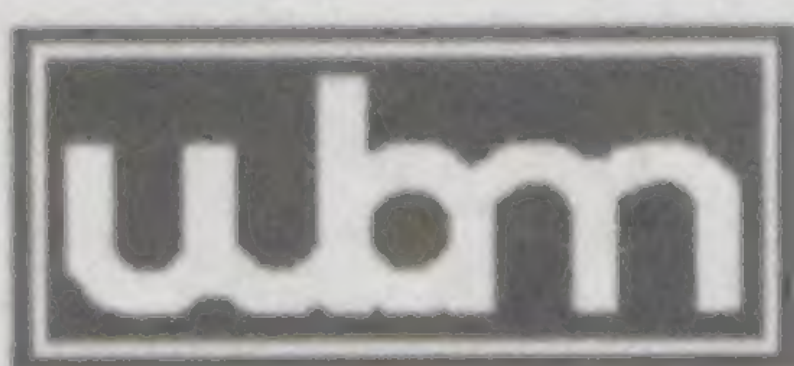
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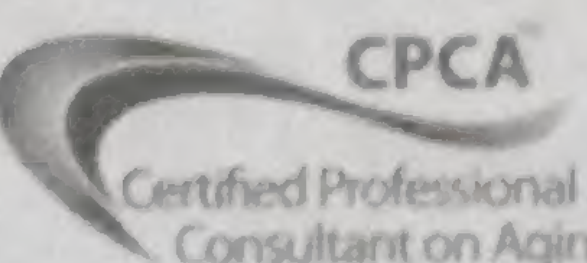
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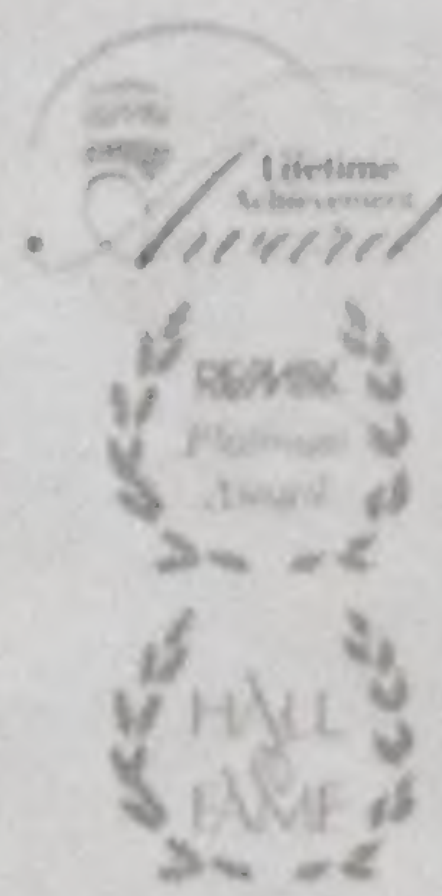
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Events/Advertising

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Feb 16 Grand Philharmonic Choir – The Passion of Joan of Arc/Voices of Light. 7:30 p.m., Centre in the Square, **Kitchener**. See this 1928 silent film masterpiece on the big screen at Centre in the Square. Join the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, Grand Philharmonic Choir and TACTUS Choral Ensemble. Mark Vuorinen, conductor. Tickets at the Centre in the Square box office, \$18 to \$70 with call 519-578-1570. More at: www.grandphilchoir.com

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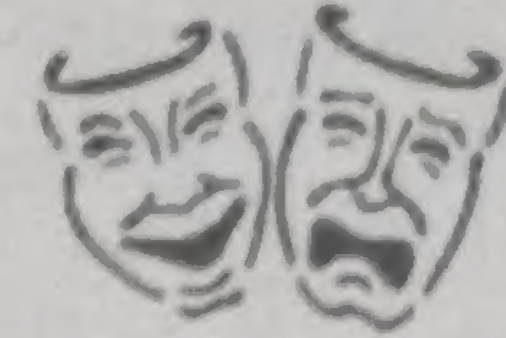
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Renewable energy ...continued from p. 15

design and selection of equipment. Conveniently, I could do this myself, but for others there are many skilled contractors who will design and build systems at a fair rate. It was a busy month, filled with approvals, permits and the procurement of equipment. With the help of friends and family, however, we were able to get the system installed and connected to the grid by December 1.

We installed a 3000 W (or 3 kW) system, comprised of 14 modules, all of which face west – not south, as one would ideally have them situated; this was because of the way our house is positioned on the street. The results I am seeing would be 10 percent better if I had been able to orient the system due south at 33 degrees, the optimum angle/slope for our location.

Assuming we had to contract the design and installation, including system costs and permits, I figure the system would have cost about \$15,000 to install. The

system has been running for just over a year, the results are as follows:

- Total power generated – 3,595 kWh in this year.
- Total CO2 offset – 2.5 tonnes of CO2 equivalent
- Total electricity consumed in our house in this year – 3,075 kWh
- Total electricity produced vs. consumed – 114 percent

This looks terrific, and from an electricity standpoint, by covering roughly one third of our roof area, we can generate ALL of the electricity we use. That said, this belies one critical aspect: that is, the total energy directly consumed by our house includes natural gas as well as electricity. With that, the energy generated by our solar photovoltaic system represents approximately 20 percent of the total energy we use on an annual basis.

So we won't get there with onsite generation alone. Even if we were to cover our

entire roof, we would likely only be able to take care of 50 – 60 percent of the annual energy needs for this house. Instead, to approach net-zero energy consumption on an annual basis, we would need to do deep energy retrofit, including replacing windows, super-insulating the walls and roof, and replacing the mechanical/electrical systems. These types of changes could easily reduce our energy consumption to half of what we presently use.

This begs the question, why didn't we do those retrofits before installing a solar PV system – the short answer is: accounting systems. We were fortunate enough to have a Feed-in-Tariff program that pays a premium rate. This meant that the economic return was about three times as fast of a payback as it would have been for the retrofit opportunities. Despite one's best intentions, it often comes back to the bottom line. The moral of the story is look at the options, run the numbers, and nine

times out of 10, first work to consume less before exploring opportunities for generation. ➤

Jordan Hoogendam is an Engineer who lives in Kitchener, Ont., with his wife and family, where he seeks to become more sustainable at home and in his work. The series will conclude in March.

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News

Which lives are 'worth it'?

The dangers of legalizing assisted suicide in Canada

Derek Miedema

The push to legalize assisted suicide and euthanasia in Canada is stronger than it has ever been before. Assisted suicide means helping a person kill themselves by providing the means for death, whereas euthanasia means directly administering death.

A court in B.C. last summer decided that Gloria Taylor, a woman with ALS, would have the right to have help killing herself (assisted suicide). That case is under appeal to the B.C. Supreme Court and is widely expected to make its way to the Supreme Court of Canada. In March of this year, a very similar case is expected to be heard by courts in Quebec. And within the first half of 2013, the provincial government in Quebec is promising to introduce a bill that would



Gloria Taylor's right to assisted suicide is currently under appeal to the B.C. Supreme Court.

make euthanasia legal there.

A bill passed in Quebec's National Assembly would change the law much faster than either of the court cases. The big wrinkle is that euthanasia and assisted suicide are outlawed in *federal* law. Only the federal government has the authority to actually change the law in this respect.

The Quebec provincial government, however, thinks they've found a way around this obstacle. They will change provincial law to redefine euthanasia as a medical treatment. The nuts and bolts of that change would mean rewriting the law to ensure that killing someone, within so-called strict guidelines, would not be considered murder. Since the provinces are responsible for healthcare delivery, Quebec proposes, they have the authority to administer euthanasia as medical treatment.

The guidelines within which euthanasia would be legal are where the rubber hits the road. What could those guidelines be? Who would be able to access it? Who would be prevented from being killed by their doctor? Media reports state that "patients themselves would have to

make the request to a doctor on the basis of unbearable physical or psychological suffering. Two physicians would have to approve the request, which would have to be made in writing . . . Any law should state that the refusal, interruption, abstention from care or the application of a terminal sedative in those circumstances could not be considered a suicide."

Slippery safeguards

These reports paint the law in broad strokes. To know how the law would work we need details. For those we turn to a report released in May 2012 by an all-party commission of the Quebec provincial government. The commission was established to examine the issue of end of life care, and "dying with dignity." (Living with Dignity, a grassroots anti-assisted suicide organization in Quebec, found that this commission reported in favour of euthanasia in spite of the fact that the vast majority of witnesses before the committee spoke against it.)

Here are the "safeguards" from that report: assisted suicide and euthanasia would not be considered murder IF the person is a Québec resident according to the Health Insurance Act; the person is an adult able to consent to treatment under the law; the person himself requests medical aid in dying after making a free and informed decision; the person is suffering from a serious, incurable disease; the person is in an advanced state of weakening capacities, with no chance of improvement; and the person has constant and unbearable physical or psychological suffering that cannot be eased under conditions he deems tolerable.

While determining who is an adult and a resident of Quebec

is straightforward, the other safeguards are less clear. For example, who defines what makes up a "free and informed decision"? Is a medical doctor the best person to judge whether an individual has been coerced into making the decision to die this way?

Likewise, who defines what a "serious, incurable disease" means? Diabetes could fit the bill. So would kidney disease without dialysis or multiple sclerosis or scoliosis of the spine. This means that people dealing with the shock of a new traumatic diagnosis could potentially choose to be killed by their doctor instead of undergoing the hardship of treatment.

Taking five and six together, "no chance of improvement" must be seen in the context of "unbearable physical or psychological suffering that cannot be eased under conditions that *he deems tolerable*" [my emphasis]. In other words, how we define "no chance of improvement," "advanced state of weakening capacities," "constant and unbearable physical or psychological suffering" depends on how the person asking for assisted suicide defines them. For an illustration of who could die under these rules, look to Belgium, which recently killed two twins, born deaf and diagnosed with glaucoma leading to permanent blindness. They couldn't bear the thought of not seeing each other, so they asked to be killed and doctors said yes.

Only the beginning

Limitations on euthanasia are always built on shifting sand. Where Quebec starts in terms of the final shape of the bill is not likely where it will end up decades down the road. Belgium didn't start out by killing deaf twins who were going blind. The Netherlands didn't start by killing babies with spina bifida, if their parents agree. They arrived at these atrocities only because the attitudes about which lives are worthy of life changed.

There, right there, is the rub for you and I. Where death is seen as a



medical treatment and a solution to suffering, those who choose to suffer instead of dying will need to answer "why." In their own minds, to their doctor, family and friends, or society at large, those people will need to justify their expensive lives.

Let me explain: why should tax dollars pay your monthly disability check when your doctor could kill you and stop those payments? Is your cancer treatment expensive? Are you worth it when the drugs to kill you are much cheaper? Is kidney dialysis too hard? Your doctor might kill you instead, if you ask him.

Euthanasia is a recipe for disastrous elder abuse. A person willing to defraud a senior family member may also be willing to abuse them to the point of death. Legalizing euthanasia would give such abusers a legal loophole through which to get away with murder.

Legalized euthanasia means that over time lives deemed unworthy of life will be judged as worthy of death. Keep an eye on the courts in BC and Quebec, but also keep an eye on the National Assembly. If Quebec manages to legalize euthanasia, other provinces may well follow suit. Be prepared to justify your life if you are vulnerable due to disability, illness or old age.

Is this the future we want for our country? ➤

Derek Miedema is a researcher for the Institute of Marriage and the Family (imfcanada.org). He lives in Smiths Falls.



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Content should reflect the principles of God's sovereignty and our mandate to interact with and reform culture. View some of our current columnists at christiancourier.ca.



In Belgium, a doctor agreed to euthanize twins who were deaf and going blind. More on this story, page 7.